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ДВЕРСІЯ

# DECOLONIAL THEORY & PRACTICE

## IN SOUTHEAST EUROPE

SPECIAL ISSUE / 03.19







**ДВЕРСИЯ**

# **DECOLONIAL THEORY & PRACTICE**

## **IN SOUTHEAST EUROPE**

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*Guest editors*

Polina Manolova

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*Images on the cover:*

1. *Demonstracije protiv agresije na CSSR - Beograd 1968*

(Demonstrations against the aggression on CSSR - Belgrade 1968)

Author: Vladimir Cervenka;

2. Roma protest against state racism - Sofia, 2019.

Author: Emil Metodiev.

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# From dialogue to practice:

## Pathways towards decoloniality in Southeast Europe

**Katarina Kušić**  
**Philipp Lottholz**  
**Polina Manolova**

**S**outheast Europe has been marked by historical legacies of domination whereby the region has been treated either as vassals of the Ottoman empire, satellites of the Soviet bloc, or poor neighbours and members of the European Union (EU) – experiences that underwrite the region’s entrenched state of (semi-)peripherality and its contemporary manifestations.\* These are constituted in both material and ideational dimensions. In the former case, peripherality refers to a politico-economic integration on unequal and exploitative terms and the resulting dependencies. In the latter, it is engendered in essentialized representations of inferiority that are reproduced in both global imaginings of the region and in its own subjectivities and positionings.

Mainstream politics, intellectual projects, and local mobilizations have in many cases accommodated and even reinforced this inferior position

\* We would like to acknowledge the contributions of Zhivka Valiavicharska and Neda Genova who provided critical comments and valuable feedback that helped us to further develop our ideas. Our sincere thanks go to the editorial team of dVERSIA for their backing in realizing this project, to Nikolay Karkov for his advice, and to all institutions and individuals who supported the 2017 Dialoguing Posts workshop in Belgrade. All of the three editors contributed equally to this introduction and the special issue as a whole.



by subscribing to the dream of “catching up” with and becoming part of Europe (and Western capitalist modernity at large). In recent years, the recognition of the impossibility of the promises of capitalist transition has produced two distinct responses. On the one side, there are those who mourn the unattainability of development and prosperity with tropes of “civilizational backwardness” and thus solidify the sense of inferiority and self-victimization. On the other, there are the ones who reject the European project in their agendas of (ethno-)nationalism, patriarchy, and “traditionalism”. The condition of peripherality and dependence, however, contains ruptures in which alternative visions can open and may offer new pathways and strategies for action that challenge and resist existing regimes and relations of power. Outside of the realm of formal politics, various initiatives and projects have confronted and exposed the contradictions and exclusionary logics of neoliberal transition and ideas of national grandeur through popular protests, activism, and art.

This special issue seeks to explore new vantage points for tackling discontents, contradictions, and unexplored alternatives in Southeast Europe by thinking with post- and decolonial theory and practice. We argue that decolonial thinking can be helpful in appreciating the region’s imperial and (quasi-)colonial legacy, in analysing contemporary forms of domination, hierarchy and resistance, and for identifying their corresponding practices of complicity and collaboration, but also of struggle, protest and reversals of the current neoliberal trajectory.

In studying Southeast Europe, the literature on postsocialist transformations in wider East Europe emerges as naturally useful.\* This literature has provided important critiques of both recent and historical forms of domination, neoliberalization, and dispossession in the region. Anthropology and sociology of postsocialism have very effectively traced and critiqued the politico-economic changes that have accompanied the integration of former socialist countries in the system of global capitalism. These include studies of large-scale decollec-

\* We are wary of the geopolitical power dynamics implied in terms like East Europe and Southeast Europe. We understand SEE as a geographical space, a sub-region within Eastern Europe. At the same time, the notion helps us tease out the important commonalities – both historical and contemporary – that mark this space, understood as including former Yugoslavian republics, Albania, Bulgaria, Romania and, in a broader sense, Greece and Turkey. We thus proceed with the acronym SEE to designate our geographic focus, but without trying to artificially separate our discussion from developments in the wider Eastern European region.

tivizations, deindustrialization and privatization, changing forms of property rights, land ownership, administrative and governing systems, as well as the dismantling of “collective” institutions, workers’ entitlements, and welfare provisions (Mandel and Humphrey 2002; Lampland, 2002; Verdery, 2003; Kideckel, 2008). Others have successfully drawn attention to the effects of postsocialist transformations on individual life-worlds and social relations by exploring the aggravation of social inequalities, the dismantling of social ties of cooperation and reciprocity, and the emergence of a “survival” habitus as a way of coping with, but also of normalizing and accepting the dramatic “changes” of that time (Kaneff, 2002; Stenning, 2006; Kaneff and Pine, 2011; Morris, 2016). They have criticized the process of “transition” and its underlying neoliberal orthodoxy not only for the devastating effects brought about by corresponding policies, but also for its teleological premise which presupposes the civilizational supremacy of Western modernism and the “lagging” development of formerly socialist countries (Burawoy and Verdery, 1999; Petrov, 2014).

Furthermore, there exists a rich scholarly field that takes inspiration from postcolonial thought to critically examine the construction of peripherality of the Balkans and Eastern Europe via analysis of cultural representations, identities, and metanarratives projected from the West. Maria Todorova’s (2009 [1997]) *Imagining the Balkans* explores the in-betweenness of the region, imagined as a bridge between Europe and the Orient. She argues that because of their ambiguous position – religious and racial similarity to the Western signifier coupled with the presence of Orthodox Christianity and Islam – the Balkans are not constituted as an incomplete other but as Europe’s “incomplete self” (1997: 17). They function as a “repository of negative characteristics” (1997: 188) in comparison to which an idealized image of the West is constantly reproduced.

Her work now serves as a cornerstone to what can be referred to as “critical Balkanist studies” which, inspired by Said’s *Orientalism* and other keyworks in postcolonial theory, continued to deconstruct dominant representations of the region (Wolff, 1994; Goldsworthy, 1998; Obad 2013; Fleming, 2000; Bjelić and Savić, 2002; and Melegh, 2006 on Eastern Europe). This literature sheds light on the Balkans as a space with its own history, sociality, transnational networks and practices which have escaped the hegemonic Western gaze in both scholarly analysis and popular imagination (Njaradi, 2012). Important contributions have also been made in the analyses of the



internalization and translation of orientalising hierarchies into local dynamics of “othering” along national, class, racial, and gender lines (Bakić-Hayden, 1995; Buchowski, 2006; Neofotistos, 2008). Bakić-Hayden’s (1995) work on “nesting Orientalism” traces this process of internalization and redirection of stigmatizing identities by following Balkan countries’ attempts to distance themselves from stereotypes and claim a more Western – and hence, more civilized, developed and advanced status – by othering those “further East” than them. Looking at the context of neoliberal reforms in Poland, Michal Buchowski shows how the ideological narratives of entrepreneurship and free market intersect with “nested Orientalisms” in the construction of classed “others” along the dichotomies of civilised/uncivilised, Western/Eastern, and capitalist/communist (Buchowski, 2006: 474). This rich strand of literature has thus already demonstrated the critical potential of a conversation between perspectives on postsocialist EE and postcolonial thought, both in terms of examining the external construction of peripherality and local categories of inferiority and domination.

A number of scholars and intellectuals from the Balkans and beyond have vocalized the need to further entwine studies of SEE with postcolonial thought (e.g. Böröcz, 2001; Bjelić and Savić, 2002; Carey and Raciborski, 2004). This conversation between different perspective leads to new understandings and analyses of global processes of transformation, integration and hegemony, as well as their interconnected and embedded natures. More explicit steps towards the initiation of such a dialogue have been outlined by Sharad Chari and Catherine Verdery (2009). They argue that a dialogue between postsocialist inquiry and postcolonial theory has the potential to articulate a new way for rethinking contemporary imperialism and pertinent processes of accumulation. This rethinking would challenge Cold War representations and their effects on theory and politics, as well as provide an anti-racist critique of state-sanctioned processes of othering and disciplining (Chari and Verdery, 2009).

Inspired by this call and by extensive discussions on post- and decolonial theory world-wide, we have convened a workshop intended to foster this *Dialoguing between the “posts”* further and to specifically identify entry points for such a dialogue with researchers and activists from across and beyond Southeast Europe. In presenting a select few of the works from this event and the discussion it has initiated, this special issue seeks to explore

both the potentials and possible misalignments of post- and decolonial theory and practice in Southeastern Europe. We have chosen this specific scope at the expense of a more explicit engagement with postcolonial or postsocialist theory (which are nevertheless also underlying this collection). This intervention is an attempt to capture and contribute to an intellectual shift and social practice that seek to not only understand, but also to challenge and change the world we live in.

The “dialoguing between the posts” scholarship have brought to the fore three overarching issues that we seek to take forward in this special issue. First, this literature highlights the interconnectedness of processes of economic integration and peripheralization of the region with global historical formations and dynamics between core and peripheries. These perspectives, which have exposed the imperial and in fact quasi-colonial ways in which geopolitical actors like the EU (Böröcz 2001) and its historical predecessors (e.g. Boatcă 2007) have extracted rents and shaped economic conduct in SEE, provide an important politico-economic basis from where the region’s peripherality and inferiority can be considered in more detail (see Karkov and Majstorović in this issue).

The second point we seek to address is the undecided, if not sometimes contradictory, positioning of the above-mentioned scholarship *vis-à-vis* the socialist legacy, its potentials, and contradictions. This concerns, first and foremost, the possibility that the experience of state socialism itself may offer inspiration and tools for building more equitable, freer, and peaceful societies today. By relegating local calls for social justice, public welfare, and worker rights to residual “socialist mentalities”, the idea of “catching up” robbed the region of precisely those tools that we need to imagine a different future. These can be found, we argue, in alternative understandings of citizenship and community that evolved in (South) East Europe’s socialist systems, and specifically in their alternative readings of modernity and interconnections that promised liberation, emancipation, and equality. On the other hand, however, it is necessary to interrogate how socialist SEE was also invested in racialized, Euro- and ethnocentric conceptions of progress and civilization that have produced regressive, exclusionary, and violent effects both during the socialist period and in its aftermath. The critical perspectives



outlined above have started to uncover the historical layering of orientalisating practices and imaginations, and the emerging scholarship on race in SEE has pushed this agenda further (Baker 2018a; Bjelić 2018). This issue's contributions will further show how the current (ethno-) nationalist trajectory of the region complicates, and sometimes even appears to preclude, the possibility of resisting neoliberal reform and dispossession – especially when nationalist “political entrepreneurs” have seized positions from which they can benefit from connections to global capital and investment markets.

The third issue is the need to strengthen the connection of SEE scholarship with the public and societal debates in the region, and, more specifically, with ongoing struggles against neoliberal and Eurocentric logics of progress and development. This is challenging because both public discourses and resistance struggles evolve with speed and intensity that is often hard to keep up with for academics who largely rely on peer-reviewed journals and books as a medium. Recently, new kinds of scholarship and writing have emerged that substantively engage *with* and *in* the struggles and attempt to resist or reverse processes of neoliberalization in SEE (see for instance Razsa and Kurnik, 2012; Bilić, 2016; Bieber and Brentin 2018; Deiana 2018). Building on these critical engagements, we seek to identify existing practices of resistance and activism towards more inclusive and just orders, or at least the sources and potentials of such sensibilities. Along the lines discussed above, we seek to show how decolonial thought can help inquire into processes of domination, transition, and resistance by reading them against the background of global formations of race, capital, and gender. Perhaps even more importantly, we seek to identify new entry points for societal activism and struggle against neoliberal restructuring and the internalization of essentialist and hierarchizing ways of thinking, acting, and knowing.

In the remainder of this Introduction, we first provide a sketch of the emergence of decolonial thought. Subsequently, and with reference to the special issue contributions, we outline its importance for and contribution to a form of inquiry into postsocialist change that is cognizant of and acts upon the regressive logics of the current modern-colonial global order and its locally specific manifestations. We additionally develop our argument on

the implications of decolonial analysis of Southeastern Europe in relation to how decoloniality can be thought and practiced in local struggles but also in global solidarities linking these. Finally, we reflect on limitations and caveats of the special issue both in terms of empirical topics and conceptual contributions.

## **The emergence and potential of decolonial thought**

A straightforward definition of the decolonial project is impossible. The core argument of decolonial theory is that, while *colonialism* has formally ceased to exist, *coloniality* is embedded firmly into the constitution of modernity: colonial forms of living and knowing continue to structure contemporary formations of capital, race, and gender. The corresponding persistence of exclusionary and violent forms of exploitation, marginalization, dispossession, and silencing need to be replaced, according to decolonial thinkers, by decolonial ways of doing, acting and knowing. These decolonial projects would be built from forms of life erased by coloniality and from the experiences of the marginalised in order to heal “colonial wounds”. This basic assumption is expressed in the conceptual unity of modernity-coloniality put forward by decolonial theorists and initially proposed by Aníbal Quijano:

*The modern world-system that began to form with the colonization of [Latin] America, has in common three central elements that affect the quotidian life of the totality of the global population: the coloniality of power, capitalism, and Eurocentrism. [...] Its globality means that there is a basic level of common social practices and a central sphere of common value orientation for the entire world (2000: 545).*

This thought is further developed by Walter Mignolo, who argues that coloniality is the “darker side of modernity” and that “[c]oloniality [...] is constitutive of modernity – there is no modernity without coloniality” (2011: 3). The “coloniality of power” (Quijano) or the “colonial matrix of power” (Mignolo) operates, as Mignolo further elaborates, in different domains (2011: 9) that have been further discussed by other decolonial thinkers. Thus, the “discovery” of the Americas did not only start a process of colonization that supposedly ended

and whose after-effects are felt today. In decolonial thought, the year 1492 presents a central moment of modernity itself: formations of race, capitalism, and gender can be traced to this foundational point in time. Decoloniality, then, does not mean the independence of nation states, nor does it imply simply confronting global/Western capitalism. It is concerned with bringing new ways of living, thinking, and being into place.

Expanding on the concept of “coloniality of being”, Maldonado-Torres writes that “colonial relations of power left profound marks not only in the areas of authority, sexuality, knowledge and the economy, but on the general understanding of being as well” (2007: 242). Besides the economy and order-making, these include global geo- and body-politics operating through race, gender, and sexuality (see Lugones, 2007; Maese-Cohen 2010) and, finally, knowledge, subjectivity, and being (discussed in works of Sylvia Wynter and Nelson Maldonado-Torres).

Even though the two are often conflated, there are significant differences between postcolonial and decolonial thought.\* First of all, they come from different geographical and theoretical positions. While postcolonial thought refers mostly to the Middle East and South Asia of the 19th and 20th centuries, decolonial scholars take as their reference point South America and earlier colonial conquests that started in the 15th century – their experience is one of *settler*, rather than *extractive* colonialism. The disciplinary origins of the two perspectives also differ: postcolonial thought largely remained in the sphere of the cultural studies and strands of Marxism (even though there are various works who defy this easy identification), while decolonial scholarship was significantly formed out of world-systems theory and development, underdevelopment and dependency theories (Bhabra, 2014).

While remaining attentive to the different origins and positions of these two schools of thought, we agree with Gurminder Bhabra (2014) and Marceke Maese-Cohen (2010) who argue for placing the two in a conversation that draws attention to the connections and synthesis between post- and decolonial theory and does not idealize one at the expense of another. In this conversation, we hope to highlight the distinct focus that decolonial thought can bring to studying SEE. This focus is not intended

\* For an engaging discussion on the difference between postcolonial and decolonial projects, see [this talk](#) by Ramón Grosfoguel.

to create “new” knowledge or bring an “integrated” understanding of the region, but explore whether a dialogue with decolonial thinkers can be as productive as the one between regional scholars and postcolonial ideas.

A significant dimension of decolonial thought is its categorical rejection of projects of “inclusion” and “integration.” Some strands of both postcolonial *politics* that focus on the nation-state, and postcolonial *theory* inspired by thinkers like Foucault and Derrida, have been criticised for their failing to construct an alternative outside of the Western reference that they so eloquently *deconstruct* (eg. Mignolo, 2007). This discussion remains outside of the scope of the special issue (see Dirlik, 2002; Moreiras, 1999), but we find this specific articulation of decolonial thought especially important for our purposes. Within SEE and EE more generally, critiques of local marginalizations and dispossessions too often based their arguments on an identification *with* Europe, instead of analysing how these regimes of oppression are globally connected or asking what an alternative mode of organising life and politics would be. In looking for alternatives, we join scholars like Maese-Cohen who insist on placing different perspectives alongside each other as a specific kind of investment:

*an experiential, pedagogical, socioeconomic, and philosophical investment in alternative modes of liberation – modes that are not necessarily “new” but that bear the traces of nonhegemonic or subaltern thinking, the survival of which evinces simultaneously the constitutive underside of modernity and the possibility of other worlds (2010: 14).*

We thus follow an understanding of decoloniality as an *epistemic* and a *political* project. Broadly speaking, this project refers to decolonising all spheres of life by enunciating the way in which life in the current capitalist system is governed by a “colonial matrix of power” and, in more practical terms, a delinking of life from this matrix and the regimes of hierarchy, exclusion and violence it is embedded in. In Mignolo’s words, “decolonial thinking and doing focus on the enunciation, engaging in epistemic disobedience and delinking from the colonial matrix in order to open up decolonial options – a vision of life and society that requires decolonial subjects, decolonial knowledges, and decolonial institutions” (2011: 10).



This implies two concrete types of action. First, on the level of knowledge production, a decolonial approach entails devising approaches that uncover erasures and tell stories of people who have been marginalised, silenced, and dehumanised in Eurocentric accounts of history (Mignolo, 2011: xxx; Mignolo and Walsh, 2018: 208). This has most significantly been demonstrated in the work of the scholar and activist Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2008) in her book *Decolonizing Methodologies* and in cognate scholarly cooperation with indigenous resistance movements (see Rutazibwa and Shilliam, 2018: 8-9). Second, on the level of praxis, organization, and policy, “decolonizing” means, as indicated by Mignolo, “opening up global but noncapitalist horizons and delinking from the idea that there is a single and primary modernity surrounded by peripheral or alternative ones” (2011: 5). This anti-capitalist strand of decolonial theory is linked to Arturo Escobar’s work on postdevelopment and presents a possible synergy with Marxist theory – including its adaptation in postcolonial scholarship – and political movements (see Rao, 2017). Nikolay Karkov’s contribution in this issue traces in further detail the emergence of a decolonial anti-capitalist critique; how it is rooted in, but also differing from, postcolonial scholarship; and, finally, how it presents an important avenue of the unfinished dialogue between the (Global) South and the East, i.e. the postsocialist world.

We briefly elaborate on the two key dimensions of decoloniality, which can be glossed as “epistemic” and “practical”. Decolonial thinking, as already indicated, means thinking from that which is erased, oppressed, silenced, exploited, and buried under the modernity/coloniality project. It is thinking from the other side, from *after* the slash between coloniality/decoloniality. Thus, a decolonial project would start with reconstructing experiences, thoughts, and ways of being and living locally. Here, *local or autochthonous* does not signify traditions that are accepted as part of global forms of knowledge shaped through the modern-colonial project. Instead, decolonial thought draws from that which is expunged from the modern-colonial project and seeks to recover silences and mend the violence and exclusions wrought by modernity-coloniality. This emphasis on locality does not imply another revival of area studies and parochial conclusions, but points to the need of approaching modernity/coloniality from specific locations and viewpoints that have so far been excluded. Perhaps more

importantly, decolonial thinking from such a geographically and socially specific standpoint would challenge how modernity has been and continues to be constructed as “normal”, desirable, and superior to any alternative mode of social organisation.

This epistemic dominance of Eurocentric frames of thought is well summarised by Quijano when he writes:

*The tragedy here is that we have all been led, knowingly or not, willingly or not, to see and to accept that image as our own reality and ours only. Because of it, for a very long time, we have been what we are not [...] And because of it, we can never catch our real problems, much less solve them, except in only a partial and distorted way (2000: 222).*

In this sense, decolonial thought argues that the reality that we see is the reality provided by the institutions, practices, and knowledge regimes of modernity/coloniality. While the totalizing tendency of such a view – as well as its inattention to race and gender as dimensions of oppression\* – has been problematized by decolonial feminist scholars (Lugones, 2007; Maese-Cohen, 2010), this formulation of epistemic power is especially important for approaching SEE. In this reality, the rising problems and deprivation, both in SEE and globally, are explained through mentalities that are unable to “do” capitalism “properly”, by temporal lags in which SEE and other world regions have to patiently wait in the ante-chamber of modernity, and by these regions’ supposedly inherent propensities to backwardness, depravity, corruption and violence.

\* Maese-Cohen (2010: 4) offers a useful summary of Lugones’ critique of Quijano’s concept of “coloniality of power”, which, as Lugones argued, was based on, and implicitly reproducing, problematic understandings of “biological dimorphism, heterosexualism, and patriarchy” that require historical deconstruction and practical undoing (Lugones 2007: 190). We agree with this critique and affirm that basic works in decolonial theory like those of Quijano or Mignolo have be read together with authors explicitly discussing the coloniality of race, gender and sexuality mentioned above and in the following. A good recent example of decolonial feminism is Gómez-Barris’ analysis of indigenous lifeworlds and protest movements through a “decolonial femme methodology” that seeks to uncover “submerged and emergent perspectives” and “the potential for forms of life that cannot be easily reduced, divided, or representationally conquered or evacuated” (2017: 3-4). Although not developed explicitly, she indicates the problem that, due to its focus on the modern-colonial system, decolonial scholarship may run the danger of getting “forever analytically imprisoned to reproducing a totalizing viewpoint that ignores life that is unbridled and finds forms of resisting and living alternative” (ibid.: 3).

In short, Quijano traces the meeting of capitalism and racialization to explain not only how the world system functions with an assumption that Europeans are superior to everyone else but explains why this is seen as natural (Quijano, 2000: 541). He identifies “two principal founding myths” of the Eurocentric system: evolutionism and dualism. Evolutionism posits a “theory of history as a linear sequence of universally valid events” leading inexorably towards European or Western civilization (2000: 550–51). Dualism naturalises the different stages of this unidirectional history: differences between Europe and other locations/cultures become a matter of “natural (racial) difference” instead of “consequence[s] of a history of power” (2000: 542). This view presents the hegemonic understanding of the whole globe (2000: 543) and thus offers a basis for how thinkers and practitioners can confront, resist, and possibly dismantle, the global modern-colonial system and its matrix of power. Further insight on the above-mentioned founding myths and epistemologies of the “colonial matrix of power” is provided in Manuela Boatcă’s analysis of modern citizenship and the Occidental epistemologies underlying it. Examining Max Weber’s writings on the “Polish question”, i.e. imperial Germany’s anxiety about lands in Eastern Prussia being increasingly settled by Poles, Boatcă exposes Weber’s anti-Polish rhetoric and the racializing and “unmistakable colonial logic” by which he declares German citizenship as the only way for this minority to be “turned ... into human beings”. She further demonstrates the status of citizenship as an “entail of colonial property”, which is most poignantly captured in the contemporary trend of “citizenship by investment” programmes. These enable wealthy people across the globe to acquire certain countries’ citizenship in exchange for capital investments, while, the same remains unreachable for the wider global population and especially for migrants and refugees, whose attempts to find shelter and social mobility are barred through racial and ethnic policing.

*The practical or political dimension of the decolonial project follows from the critical epistemic positioning, as it propagates the necessity of learning from and advancing different ways of life that refuse to be subdued by modernity/coloniality.*

In the following, we outline the ways in which decolonial theory and practice, as they can be conceived in the epistemic and practical-political terms discussed above, foreground critical forms of knowledge and action in Eastern and Southeastern Europe.

## **Towards a decolonial perspective on postsocialist SEE**

Although conversations and research on decoloniality have largely been centred on Latin America, the Caribbean, and the Pacific, some work has been done in thinking about decoloniality in the former socialist part of the world, which spans the Eurasian landmass. Madina Tlostanova's *Gender Epistemologies and Eurasian Borderlands* (2010), for instance, examined the Eurasian borderlands in the Caucasus and Central Asia and was engaged in a dialogue with decolonial thinking from Latin America (Mignolo and Tlostanova, 2012). In her influential article in a special issue of the *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, Tlostanova rejects the idea to simply "apply postcolonial theory to postsocialist spaces" or include East European perspectives into the debates on postcolonial theory (Tlostanova, 2012: 332). Instead, she asks how we might set in motion a different project: a project that would start "with the geopolitics and body-politics of knowledge growing out of the local histories, subjectivities and experiences of eastern and south-eastern Europe, central Asia, Caucasus or Russia?" (2012: 332). This, together with her analysis of practices and possibilities of resisting and deflecting imperial forms of domination (2012: 140; 2010: ch. 6), is arguably a key starting point for approaching and formulating a decolonial perspective on (South) East Europe and thus an important conceptual step Tlostanova's work has provided.

Tlostanova discusses the intersecting nature of Soviet coloniality with a critical decolonial perspective on the Soviet Union's status as a "second class empire", different from the "first class" empires of the Western British, French, or German. This, she argued, had led to "generating mutant forms of the main vices of modernity – secondary Eurocentrism, secondary orientalism, secondary racism" as "Russia has projected its own inferiority complexes onto its colonies" in the Caucasus and Central Asia (2012: 135). This critical stance has led her to largely dismiss the region's socialist heritage



as entirely absorbed into the global matrix of “modernity-coloniality”, with little to nothing being left to be salvaged from this experience for building a decolonial alternative to it (Tlostanova, 2015). This rather categorical pessimism is further explored in this issue by Marina Gržinić, who argues that, while racializing and dehumanizing tendencies of socialist regimes deserve critical attention, the project of socialist modernity cannot be dismissed as it still offers important insights and inspiration for present struggles of resistance against ‘necro-’ and ‘turbo-neoliberal capitalism’. Elaborating her argument through a genealogy of conceptual relations between, respectively, capitalism, socialism, postsocialism, and post- and decolonial thought, Gržinić presents a pertinent argument that the present necropolitical capitalist regime can only be effectively tackled if trans-feminist, LGBTQI, anti-fascist, anti-racist, Marxist-Black Studies, and migrant standpoints are linked in theoretical dialogue and activist struggles.

Notwithstanding this ongoing debate on how to approach the heritage of socialism and its racializing and imperial undertones, both Tlostanova and scholars coming from a political economy perspective (like Böröcz, 2001; Boatcă, 2007; 2012) have developed important tools for critically examining the subjugated, dependent, and inferior positions of (South) Eastern Europe and other (semi-) peripheries. Most importantly for our purpose, Manuela Boatcă (2012) considers Eastern Europe as a space that never experienced formal colonization but was, and continues to be, profoundly shaped by unequal and exploitative relationships with geopolitical power centres like the European monarchies or the EU (see Boatcă 2007; 2008). She invites us to consider the work of imperial difference – “the less overtly racial, more pronounced ethnic, and distinct class hierarchies” which account for the relations between European empires and their former subjects (2007: 134). Boatcă thus places the Balkans in epigonal Europe, that is, in a semi-peripheral position to “Europe proper”. However, she emphasises that even in this semi-peripheral position, the region reproduces European modernity as it strives to become part of it. Such an analysis of the colonial character (both historical and contemporary) of the relations between semi-peripheries like (South) East Europe with core regions such as Western Europe/ the EU or others (e.g. Russia, and increasingly China) foregrounds a critical understanding of the *status quo*. Accordingly, it presents the first step for

thinking of ways to challenge it and work towards decolonial alternatives on individual and collective levels.

However, as already indicated, a key idea that this special issue pursues is that the experience of socialism itself may provide new entry points and potentials for thinking and working towards decoloniality. As Karkov and Valiavicharska (2018) argue, we can see “the historical experience of state socialism as a way of collective co-existence (in the form of practices, social mores, institutional arrangements, alternative systems of value, etc.) [...] in significant tension with both Occidental reason and the logic of capitalist accumulation” (2018: 791). This affirms that, contrary to Tlostanova’s categorical writing off of this period, we should see the socialist experience as *both* implicated within the modern-colonial capitalist system, and simultaneously pointing to openings for challenging it through new understandings of personhood, society, and the future based on freedom, creativity, and solidarity (see Valiavicharska’s and Karkov’s contributions).

In a similar vein, Ovidiu Țichindeleau (2013: n.p.) has argued that “the weapons of decolonial thought and imagination are growing from memories and experiences of repression, resistance, and liberation”, which may go back to the socialist period or even further. Besides obvious examples like social justice, state provision of institutions and financial support for social reproduction, and hence more equal opportunities for women, the socialist sources of emancipatory and inclusive action also include autonomy, economic democracy in the form of self-management (e.g. in workers councils or collectives, see Ramović, 2018), and solidarity across social groups, categories, and international borders. The key challenge such a political endeavour faces is the fact that contemporary regimes of truth in SEE and other postsocialist countries subject their societies to epistemic “self-colonization” through “instituting a normative history that asks people to take an absolute distance from their own past” (Țichindeleanu, 2013). A decolonial project would thus have to expose how “anticommunism was instrumentalized as the regional articulation of the colonality of power in the former socialist bloc” and is at the heart of the “insidious repression and even fabrication of people’s relation to their own historical experience” (ibid.).

In working to recover the socialist legacy and its positive potentialities, Valiavicharska’s contribution to this issue focuses especially on anti-fascist/

anti-racist campaigning, solidarity, and cooperation with Third World countries in socialist Bulgaria. At the same time, she makes clear that slogans of “people’s friendship” and solidarity with the Third World’s people of colour should not be romanticized and isolated from ethno-nationalist discourses and policies, as they most significantly manifested in campaigns of assimilation of ethnic and religious minorities. Likewise, Bozhin Traykov identifies the positive achievements of socialism in Bulgaria in terms of welfare and social justice and exposes their systematic erasure in the present-day public discourse. This erasure enables the construction of the hegemonic idea that neoliberal capitalism is the one and only mode of social organization. While not explicitly taking a decolonial approach, this analysis builds an important foundation for a decolonial project as it enunciates the Bulgarian iteration of the colonial matrix of power and the corresponding hegemonic narratives and policies.

The two key aspects discussed so far – a critical understanding of Southeast Europe’s position in the global modern-colonial-capitalist system, and the necessity of recovering the emancipatory potential of socialism – foreground a third aspect of decoloniality in the region. This third aspect relates to the possibilities of resistance towards and liberation from the neoliberal and imperial trajectory of transformation that the region has been subjected to for the past 30 years. In his works on decolonial aesthetics, Țichindeleanu (2013: n.p.) invites us to nurture such openings that go beyond “internal” critiques of liberalism and aim at “decolonizing the imaginary and rebuilding alliances, against the dissemination of cynicism, ethnocentric nationalism, and postcommunist racism”. We develop this third aspect in more depth in the following section, which also spells out how the critical knowledge and perspective of decolonial thinking feed into pathways towards decolonial praxis.

It is within this complex territory, which links the particular and the universal in both theoretical understandings and in actions, that decolonial thought demonstrates its contributions. Decolonial theory offers a critical insight to understandings of domination, oppression, and exploitation in SEE: it places these regimes within the global system of modern-colonial capitalism and its matrix of power. This points to the complicity and parallels of socialism in SEE and beyond with racialized, gendered and classed forms of ordering. And at the same time, as we have sought to show, decolonial

theory can also aid more explicit articulations of the potentialities that the socialist experiences offer for ways to challenge these regimes and practices. We consider these possibilities and their links with the epistemic entry points of decolonial thoughts in turn.

## **Thinking decoloniality as coevalness, global solidarity, and joint struggle**

In the foregoing sections, we have laid out primarily the theoretical and conceptual contribution we seek to make to perspectives on SEE. First, an understanding of the globally connected nature of the region's (semi-) peripherality in both its present and historicized guise. And second, the need to appreciate the socialist experience in terms of both emancipatory and liberatory potentials, but also as a source of regressive nationalist and identitarian thinking. In this section, we want to further elaborate the implications of this alternative approach and – via the concepts of coevalness and global solidarity – develop our third point on the need of engaging with specific struggles.

Coevalness, understood as belonging to the same spatio-temporal condition or “stage”, is a crucial concept for understanding the connections and parallels between trajectories of domination, coercion, violence and erasure that traverse centuries and locations. Johannes Fabian (1983) discussed the “denial of coevalness” in his critique of classical anthropology and its underlying linear conceptions of time. In this denial, non-Western societies are not only essentialized, but are seen as a “stage” through which the imperial centres have long passed. This expulsion from contemporaneity not only foregrounds teleological expectations of progress, but also shapes the interrelations and infrastructures constituting the history and the present of both the global South and the North. Especially after 1989, disciplines like area studies, political science, and anthropology accepted this linear and teleological conception of modernity – they embarked on a mission of explaining the way for SEE to “overcome” its civilizational deficiencies and helping it reach the stage of modern capitalism and democracy. In this way, coevalness has been continuously denied to postsocialist, postcommunist, and post-Soviet countries in SEE and beyond.



The reaction that we propose in light of this “denial of coevalness” is not an *inclusion* of SEE into the modern-capitalist structures – whether those of the EU or “the West” more generally. Thinking about the region as always coeval with both the colonizers and the colonized recovers the role that SEE played in the constitution of modernity, and simultaneously unearths peripheral connections not reliant on the Global North as their centre. This kind of thinking can help bring European peripheries and the Global South closer: both in thinking how they always made each other’s histories, and in thinking together about different futures. The logical consequence of such thinking is to see parallels, possibilities of solidarity, and lateral connection that travel horizontally through “sideway glances” (Shilliam, 2015b). Robbie Shilliam’s (2015a) *The Black Pacific* demonstrates this project by drawing out connections between African and Māori anti-colonial struggles to “support, renew and extend [...] a deep, global infrastructure of anti-colonial connectivity” (2015a: 5). In turning his gaze away from the power centres, he calls upon us to “displace, rather than dwell upon the operation” of European power (2015a: 4).

From a historical perspective, the connections between SEE and the Global South are obvious in the socialist period. An example is found in Ljubica Spaskovska’s work that investigates how South-South labour mobility and large-scale Yugoslav investment projects in the developing world both resisted and participated in creating the new contours of the international division of labour in the Cold War (Spaskovska, 2018). Unexpected connections are highlighted by Catherine Baker (2018a: 148-151) when she talks about the Afro-Montenegrin/Afro-Albanian families in Ulcinj (Montenegro) – people whose histories are made in the connections between SEE and the Mediterranean slave trade, people erased by a fixation either on “Europe” or on the Balkans as “white”. In a similar vein, Zhivka Valiavicharska (this issue) analyses socialist Bulgaria’s solidarity with anti-colonial struggles and inequality both in the Third and First Worlds. On a more global scale, sources and practices of solidarity between socialist countries of the European peripheries and Global South countries (and their significance for decolonial thought) have been apparent in the Non-Aligned Movement and its founding moment at the Bandung conference (see Pham and Shilliam, 2016).

The complex historical entanglements that connect SEE to both the First and Third Worlds are the basis of Špela Drnovšek-Zorko's piece in this issue, which draws on her research with Bosniak and Serb migrants in the UK to foreground the complexity of the encounter between SEE and coloniality. In navigating life as immigrants worthy of recognition in postcolonial Britain, her interlocutors attach themselves to whiteness and Europeanness. Using a racializing hierarchy allows them to distance themselves from "other" (non-White) migrants and make claims as deserving subjects in a profoundly racialized host society. At the same time, however, these migrants invoke the non-aligned history of Yugoslavia – in making sense of their own exclusion from the majority, they are able to reach into the history of anti-colonial solidarity and narrate a critique of empire and colonialism. This kind of work that "deconstruct[s] postsocialist subjectivity so that it acknowledges its colonizing and colonized position – as well as its anti-colonial legacy", shows both the rich openings of coeval thinking and offers a starting point for future projects of anti-racist and decolonial reconstructions.

The need for coevalness and solidarity is not confined to international or regional levels. Like the oppression, exclusion, and violence of the modern-colonial system, it also needs to be translated into a source of support and common struggle among people who are separated along racial, ethnic, class, or gender lines while inhabiting the same spatial confines. Decolonial authors have turned to global race formations and the way they have both shaped and were enacted in the Balkans. In the context of SEE, Catherine Baker (2018a; 2018b), Dušan Bjelić (2018) and Špela Drnovšek Zorko (2018) have put an end to "the racial exceptionalism" that had previously marked studies on the region. Vedran Vučetić and Jelena Subotić (2017) and Nikolay Karkov (2015) draw out how Yugoslav socialism was invested in global regimes of whiteness and racialization while pursuing its emancipatory agendas.

A recent example of practical confrontations with racial regimes is the Bulgarian mobilization against governmental measures of displacement and segregation of Roma, as well as the political and public rhetoric calling for the restriction of minority rights. The anti-racist protests that took place both in Bulgaria and several European capitals have demonstrated the strong resonance of the issue across national borders and have invoked a vocabulary that –

through terms like “fascism” or “apartheid” – exhibits the parallels between local contemporary forms of ethnic exclusion and global histories of racism.

Lastly, a decolonial approach proceeds with the assumption that “theory is doing and doing is “thinking” (Walsh and Mignolo, 2018: 7). Decolonial thought promotes a fundamental change in the vantage point for social inquiry and action: it propagates not only the analytical dissecting of global modernity-coloniality – something that postcolonial scholarship has successfully engaged in, but it requires identifying and cultivating practices and spaces that seek to dismantle it. We share the sentiment that decolonial thinking should not and cannot be conceived as a merely intellectual or empirical pursuit but needs to be grounded in lived experiences and linked with and directed towards changing the world. While we acknowledge the general value of conceptualizing and dialoguing between different theoretical approaches, our key concern is to link critical inquiry with initiatives that seek to bring about radical change and transformation of societies.

Political initiatives that open up different ways of understanding and acting already exist in different spaces of SEE. Some examples include the cooperation of Ljubljana Pride with Rudy Loewe on *Decolonising Queer*,\* *The Telciu Summer School* that has been bringing together scholars, students, and activists together since 2012,\*\* and the multitude of artists, activists, and political organizers around SEE and Eastern Europe more generally (see Țichindeleanu, 2013). While these initiatives are particularly valuable for the explicit decolonial angle they embrace, the primary purpose of this issue is to turn attention to the *potentials and sensibilities* for anti-hegemonic, anti-racist, and possibly decolonial agendas in the region’s present struggles and movements.

Recent years are marked by an increasing number of public mobilizations throughout SEE in which thousands take to the streets to voice their anger at the dehumanizing consequences of by now 30 years of neoliberal “transition”. Even though these protests are in many ways limited to liberal imaginaries of collective decision-making – as expressed in discourses of “anti-corruption”, cadre politics of individualized blame, or pro-EU narratives – they nevertheless raise important issues with the structural dysfunctionalities of markets, institutions, and political regimes. For example, “the system

\* More info on Decolonizing Queer in Ljubljana on [this link](#).

\*\* More info on the Telciu Summer School on [this link](#).

is killing us” (*Sistemata ni ubiva*), a slogan originally used by Bulgarian mothers of children with disabilities to demand political attention to their problems, sparked wide resonance with different social causes precisely because it captures the systematic dimensions of discontent in seemingly particular policy areas. Popular demands for the nationalization of important industries, protection of public spaces from private development projects, and against the marketization of public health articulate an even clearer rejection of neoliberal policies and their exclusionary effects.

Instances of such rejection can be observed throughout the region. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, a country that experienced violent conflict and has been *de facto* governed by the Office of the High Representative, the discontent with the emerging neoliberal order and detached political elites has been loudly expressed. The 2014 plenums that happened across BiH captured both regional and global imaginations: they not only provided scathing critiques of neoliberal reforms that went hand in hand with internationally supported ethno-nationalist projects, but they experimented with new forms of democratic participation and served as both prefigurative and transformational politics (see Kurtović, 2015; Arsenijević, 2014; Kurtović and Hromadžić, 2017). In this issue, Danijela Majstorović examines recent waves of protest against privatization and restructuring in BiH, but also in reaction to wrongdoing of criminal justice authorities\* – all against the background of the country’s peripherality and marginality. Her analysis shows how through collective mobilization ordinary people are able to put pressure both on enterprise owners and decision makers. In so doing, they draw on the positive potential of the Yugoslav socialist heritage, as expressed in the plenums and principles of workers’ self-management. While these examples point to the decolonial potential of socio-political struggles and protests in SEE, their short-lived nature, narrow scope, and silence on political issues that could complicate them also indicate the need to further connect and sensitize these projects towards a decolonial vantage point.

The examples from Bulgaria and BiH above, as well as the ongoing protests in Belgrade that are unfolding as we are finishing this piece, are what makes SEE a crucial space of investigation. While not adopting an explicitly decolonial

\* The “Justice for David” (Pravda za Davida) movement demands a proper investigation into a young man’s obscure death.



approach, these sites of struggle show the dissatisfaction with, and openings in, the system of modernity/coloniality as enacted in the region. Moreover, these struggles make obvious the need to reconsider what kind of critical work can be done from specific localities around the world to challenge the formations of race, class, and gender that operate globally.

## **Caveats and future research**

Perhaps unsurprisingly in a collection that seeks to start conversations rather than sum them up, there are several issues that are important in the dialoguing between postsocialism and decoloniality, but that remain unexplored in the following pages. A key challenge to post- and decolonial theory and praxis in the region comes from the fact that the loudest rejection of European modernity comes from right-wing, nationalist, nativist, and violent politics. These narratives and movements remain subscribed to an ontology of difference that categorizes spaces and people according to frameworks of race and nation. Recent campaigns, public discourses, and perceptions about the need to curb the settling or even passing through of refugees are just one reminder of the significance and reified nature of identitarian thinking in SEE societies. Whether and how such thinking can be overcome is a question without an easy answer. Although we do not discuss this problem in detail in the special issue, it creates an imperative for decolonial approaches to delineate their endeavour from the ultimately exclusionary and dehumanizing logics of these self-proclaimed national emancipatory agendas.

Relatedly, it has to be acknowledged that in SEE there are no easily identifiable indigenous forms of life and knowledge that ground decolonial projects in the Americas, Africa, and Asia. Without forgetting the need to further excavate silenced knowledge, we propose a turn to praxis – socialist as well as “postsocialist” – that stubbornly continues to seek “existence otherwise” even when we are told that there is no alternative to the march of time. Putting these efforts into conversations with forms of knowledge that have been over-, re- and unwritten by national and socialist projects is an endeavour that decolonial inquiry will have to undertake in SEE. The contribution of the special issue is, however, limited

to pointing to the potential of recovering knowledge and experience from the socialist period.

The three topics that we discussed in Belgrade but remain outside of this special issue relate to the importance of Islam in the region, struggles around urban spaces, and gender and sexuality. Islam has profoundly shaped both the region's identity and its place in structures of modernity. The work of Piro Rexhepi is instructive here: he shows how Islam played a crucial role in determining the borders of Europe and the Balkans as its periphery. Moreover, he emphasizes how the "Europeanising project" has been involved in constant attempts to separate Balkan Muslims from the rest of the Muslim world (Rexhepi, 2018). Rexhepi draws from "Islamic scholars and activists, particularly women and underprivileged minorities [...] whose intellectual labour has traversed the East/West, Ottoman/post-Ottoman, and Communist/post-Communist thresholds" to write a different story of Islam in the Balkans, one that contradicts the hegemonic anti-colonialist (anti-Ottoman) and postsocialist narratives (2018: 55). Breaking away from "linear, forward looking post-Ottoman and post-socialist temporalities" (2018: 55) of Muslim history in Eastern Europe as separated from the rest of the *ummah* [the entire Muslim community], Rexhepi uncovers the ceoavnelss of spaces which was silenced and erased by colonialist and nationalist narratives that sought to place Balkan Muslims within "the historical timeline and space of Europe" (2018: 55). It is these connections that will have to be unearthed and followed if we are to write a different history of the region. The second omission concerns the struggles around urban space and built environment in the region. As we sat in Belgrade in the warm days of September 2017, we witnessed the grand reimagining of the Sava river bank as the notorious *Belgrade Waterfront* project. In his talk at the conference, Miloš Jovanović reminded us that the same area has already been a site of violent modernization through erasure: *Sava mahala* used to be an area of poor shacks, a refuge for Roma and Gadge escapees from feudal estates. *Sava mahala* was burned to the ground by Prince Miloš in 1834 to make space for a new Christian administrative centre of the city that was supposed to serve as a counterpoint to the Ottoman development on the Danube banks. It is this history that is evoked when masked men displace refugees, Roma migrants, and those living in state-owned housing to make space for Belgrade Waterfront in today's *Savamala* (Jovanović, 2016). The important lesson of

Jovanović's remarks is that contemporary struggles around what public space is, how to use it, and what it means to "develop" it, cannot be explained without being historicized – "such projects rely on historical amnesia to weave their origin stories" (Jovanović, 2016; 2018).<sup>\*</sup> It is this historical amnesia that can be challenged by thinking about buried connections and forgotten histories. And lastly, this special issue does not substantially address the issue of gender and how it has been produced at the intersection of multiple modernities and empires. Importantly, it was precisely feminism that connected socialist politics to both the Global North and the Global South during socialism. Kristin Ghodsee's work, for example, excavates the leading role that feminists from the "Second World" had in the United Nations' *Decade of Women* – the alliances of leftist women in Eastern Europe with their contemporaries in the Global South shed light on much of the development of early "global feminism" (Ghodsee, 2019). In highlighting the omission of feminism from this issue, we are fortunate to be able to point to the rich body of work that has already tackled the hierarchies of transnational formations of gender in the region (Blagojević, 2009; Mizielińska and Kulpa, 2011; Bakker 2016). Insightful feminist scholarship uncovered how gender discourses and practices played a crucial role in the post-1989 "transition" (Gal and Kligman, 2011) while also being subject to evolving "waves", positionalities, and tensions between them (e.g. Majstorović, 2016). Scholars have situated issues of sexuality in imperial legacies and current aspirations to "become European" (Rexhepi, 2016; Sloodmaeckers, Touquet, and Vermeersch, 2016), and there are those who are writing histories that were previously at risk of being forgotten (Ghodsee, 2019; Bilić and Radoman, 2019). It is from these experiences of particular struggles and by being acutely aware of the dangers of universals that we hope to continue building emancipatory thinking and practice in the region

**Bibliography** ↘

<sup>\*</sup> For more on Belgrade Waterfront, see the documentary by KURS and Miloš Jovanović [Waterfront: A post-Ottoman post-socialist story](#).







# Dialoguing between the South and the East: An unfinished project

**Nikolay Karkov**



*Image Description:*

President Tito meets Kenyans who have received their university education in Yugoslavia. Kenya, 1970. Source: Ana Sladojević (in Vučetić, R. and Betts, P. (2017) (eds.) Tito in Africa. Picturing Solidarity. Belgrade: Museum of Yugoslavia.

**T**his text was originally commissioned in the wake of *Dialoguing “between the Posts”: Post-socialist and Post-/Decolonial Perspectives on Domination, Hierarchy, and Resistance in Southeastern Europe*, a 2017 conference on postsocialism and postcoloniality in Belgrade, Serbia. The conference’s original title was an explicit reference to Chari and Verdery’s well-known piece from the end of the preceding decade (2009). What this special issue is trying to bring about instead could easily be grouped under the rubric of “Dialoguing between the South and the East”. Such a reformulation strikes me as pertinent not only because the “dialogue” between at least the normative articulations of postcolonial and postsocialist theory is difficult to stage from the start, as Chari and Verdery readily acknowledged: one emerged in the 1980s in a somewhat belated response to earlier anti-colonial struggles, the other after the end of the Cold War in response to the collapse of socialism, leading to, among others, very different political agendas. But also, because the temporal framing of postcoloniality and postsocialism implies a critical relationship to what precedes both posts, whereas for many of the contributors to this special issue (myself included) colonialism and socialism are anything but equally or even comparably “oppressive”. Last but not least, the (Global) South and the (socialist and postsocialist) East as understood here challenge the idea that the two were completely discrete and disconnected entities, with radically divergent trajectories and political priorities. South-East dialogues capture this complex temporality and its spatial articulations in a way that does not necessarily invoke the negative stigma implicit in, at least, post-socialist intellectual production. The idea of South-East dialogues invites us both to consider important work done in the past and to try to take the conversation further, both theoretically and politically.

In this text I seek to make a minor contribution to such an expansion of the conversation, by attending to three aspects of this dialoguing between the South and the East as I see them. In the first part I discuss the “missed encounter” between postcolonial and (anti-capitalist) postsocialist theory in the region, as it unfolded especially after the mid-1990s. I suggest that, their crucial insights notwithstanding, it was the two posts’ mutual opacity and unintelligibility that set important limits to their theoretical and political potential. In the second part, I look at more recent developments that seek

to forge a rapprochement between the two sides, including those inspired by the decolonial turn in the human and social sciences. The decolonial framework, as it is being articulated by East European scholars, has the great advantage of accommodating both the anti-capitalist and the postcolonial discourses, as they pertain to the region. In the third part I explore the important *bonus insights* proffered by the decolonial-anti-capitalist critique in particular, for not only understanding better our present predicament, but also for facilitating more radical (because more nuanced) types of political action. And finally, in a brief conclusion I revisit the political urgency of (re)engaging in a robust South-East dialogue, as the combined forces of neoliberal austerity and persistent racial othering continue to wreak havoc in the region and around the world.

Careful readers of the whole issue will probably notice significant overlaps but also some differences of emphasis between the *Introduction* and the present text. Both of these are more than a perhaps predictable by-product of writing the two texts independently of one another and originally planning to use this writing as the issue's afterword.. More importantly, they also testify to our intention to both foreground recent critical scholarship that, nonetheless, continues to find itself mostly on the margins of the academic and activist conversation, and highlight the heterogeneity of voices and perspectives that constitute its multiple trajectories. A certain "dialectical" spark shoots between the *Introduction* and this reading, and quite possibly through all of our included texts as well, as they converse with and mutually enrich one another without reduction. As we seek to introduce a set of new questions, problems, and methodologies to *dVERSIA*'s readership, we (the four co-organizers of the 2017 conference) decided that it is only right that we "bear the device" and attend to the full richness, complexity, and internal tensions of what I call below the second (and possibly even third) generation of radical post/decolonial anti-capitalist theorizing in the region. It will be up to our readers to determine how they want to position themselves with respect to the challenges of this new scholarship.

## The missed encounter of the 1990s

The 1990s were more than a period of major transformations in Eastern Europe that saw formerly centralized economies open up to market competition and foreign direct investment, while Communist Party-dominated political arrangements made room for pluralist democratic practices and electoral systems. It was also a time of great economic and political turbulence, as a hastily declared “end of history” was yielding to doctrines of a New World Order and even a “clash of civilizations”. During the first decade of the postsocialist transition this turbulence manifested itself in an explosive combination of endemic economic crises becoming the norm and rapidly intensifying interethnic and religious conflicts culminating in the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s. In this particular conjuncture, two critical master discourses sought to examine its deeper structural roots and to offer provisional solutions as well.

It was at this time that Eastern Europe produced its own local version of “postcolonial theory”. Stimulated by a sustained engagement with Edward Said’s work from almost two decades earlier, Eastern European intellectuals sought to repurpose Said’s conception of “orientalism” to a region that was somehow similar yet also strikingly different. Larry Wolff’s magisterial *Inventing Eastern Europe*, for instance, traced the emergence of the category of “Eastern Europe” to the period of the West European Enlightenment, when an earlier intercontinental North-South antagonism was being displaced toward an East-West axis that conveniently lumped together Russia, Bohemia, and the Balkans. As part of this “intellectual project of demi-orientalization” of the region, as Wolff called it, Eastern Europe both helped define the West by contrast and served as a mediator and “bridge” between Europe proper and the Orient (Wolff, 1994: 13).<sup>\*</sup> Bringing the debate closer to home (both spatially and temporally), Milica Bakić-Hayden coined the concept of “nesting orientalisms” to refer to patterns of inferiorization produced within Eastern Europe itself where the “Asia/the East” always began a little further east of one’s own borders (Bakić-Hayden, 1995: 918). Identifying what she called

<sup>\*</sup> Ezekiel Abramovsky disagrees with Wolff’s chronology, arguing instead that rather than being “born” during the 18<sup>th</sup>-century Enlightenment, the idea of “Eastern Europe” was more likely a product of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in places like France (2005).

a (local) “gradation of ‘Orient’”, Bakić-Hayden’s argument spoke not only to Western constructions of the region, but also to how they traveled within and overdetermined regional relations as well, notably in former Yugoslavia.

Others took their distance from the conceptual vocabulary of Said’s analysis while still taking inspiration from his work. Most famously, Maria Todorova’s *Imagining the Balkans* argued against understanding of what she called “balkanism” as a sub-species of orientalism but as a rather different thing altogether. Tracing the language of “balkanization” to the Balkan wars of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Todorova understood it to refer to not only the parcelization and fragmentation of political units, but also to a “reversion to the tribal, the backward, the primitive, the barbarian” (2009: 3). The term’s frequent redeployment since then, especially in moments of political crisis, has always been directly correlated with the Ottoman legacy. Yet, unlike orientalism’s construction of an “imputed opposition” between Europe and its Oriental “Other”, the Balkans followed a logic of an “imputed ambiguity” (2009: 17) as the West’s “incomplete self” (2009: 18). Notably, to the list of Todorova, Bakić-Hayden, and Wolff’s analyses one should also add authors such as Vesna Goldsworthy, Nataša Kovačević, and others, as part of a theoretical intervention that profoundly changed the interpretative framework during this first decade of the postsocialist transition (Goldsworthy, 1998; Kovačević, 2008). No less importantly, these analyses sought to directly respond to the ready mobilizations of “ancient hatreds” and “Balkan powder keg” metaphors, by identifying long-standing patterns of inferiorization of the region against a perceived Western “civilizational” standard.

Politically, Eastern European “postcoloniality” was at least in part a response to the Yugoslav wars and their representation “under Western eyes” (its character as a theoretical response to uncritically complacent adaptations of postmodern theory in the region extends beyond the scope of this essay). Yet, it is only in this overdetermined context that one can fully appreciate the different path taken by the second critical discourse of the period, that of the anti-capitalist Left. To be sure, there were multiple reasons behind that difference. To begin with, unlike the local variation of postcolonial theory, literally a product of the postsocialist transition, the anti-capitalist critique in the region had important antecedents to look up to, extending even further back than the Cold War (Marxism and anarchism



had been a standard feature of regional debates well into the 19th century). Moreover, while postcolonial theorizing developed in an uneasy proximity to intensified fascination with all things Western, the leftist critique had to negotiate the no less complicated relationship with a now discredited socialist past. Yet perhaps even more importantly for my purposes here, the direct target of this leftist anti-capitalist discourse was not, or at least not primarily, the resurgence of ethnic and religious conflicts and the representational discourses that fueled them. Rather, as they zoned in on the New Enclosures, the renewed forms of primitive accumulation and the repositioning of Eastern Europe as a supplier of a cheap workforce and resources on the semi-periphery of global capitalism, the region's anti-capitalist intellectuals foregrounded the conflict between labour and capital as both an interpretative grid of analysis and as a primary terrain of resistance. Capital, rather than "culture", seemed to hold the key to both theoretical understanding and praxical action.

Savoj Žižek, the region's most well-known radical intellectual, provides a case in point. While he may have exposed Western constructions of the Balkans as the "unconscious of Europe" during the Yugoslav wars (2008; 2006: 23-4), in a manner reminiscent of Bakić-Hayden's "nesting orientalisms" thesis,\* Slavoj Žižek's *real* take on the "Balkan question" has been, for quite some time now, decoupled from the region's own geography. Since at least the late 1990s and through the lens of his Lacanian Marxism, Žižek has proposed to read the proliferation of ethnic fundamentalisms (and also multicultural differences) after the Cold War as both an expression and a displacement of a more primordial social antagonism, that of Capital itself (Žižek, 2006: 27). Faced with the increasingly spectral nature of capitalist accumulation, both individual and collective subjects seek refuge in their communal identity, while also displacing the social antagonism onto an ethnic and cultural other (2006: 167). The only way out of this trap of false-universality-as-cultural-particularity, for Žižek, is for the subject to sever its link with its own culture and become *kulturlos* (i.e. cultureless, Žižek, 2007: 662), so that it can access the only liberatory position, that of empty universality (2007: 665). For the philosopher, and presumably

\* Žižek's work from that period has also been mired in significant political and theoretical controversy (see e.g. Bjelić, 2014).

no less for the resistant political activist from the Balkans, “ethnic roots, national identity, and so on are simply not categories of truth” (2007: 664).

A similar logic underlies Gáspár Miklós Tamás’s otherwise highly useful concept of “post-fascism”. Defined as the reversal of “the Enlightenment tendency to assimilate citizenship to the universal condition” (reserved now only for the Westernized middle classes of the population), post-fascism breeds what Tamás calls “ethnicism”, i.e. ethnic and intercultural conflicts, which a (liberal) multicultural politics is too weak to confront and resolve (Tamás, 2013). The only effective opposition that Tamás envisions to the toxic cocktail of post-fascism and ethnicism are “truly egalitarian tendencies – not to speak of truly communist currents – [which] will not aim at differentiation and diversity, although their starting point is exactly this. Class, race and cultural differences are those they must want to obliterate” (2013: 26).<sup>\*</sup> And lest the reader may consider these to be isolated cases, note the class reductionism in the following passage from a recent radical text on former Yugoslavia: “The story is yet to be written of ‘ethnic conflicts’ initiated by the incorporation of Eastern Europe into a Western dominated capitalist economy that activated existing federal ethno-territorial institutional arrangements and encouraged land grabbing as a type of primitive accumulation by the ethno-nationalist elites” (Horvat and Štiks, 2015: 22). In Horvat and Štiks’s rendition, it is Western capitalism that is solely (or at least mostly) responsible for the resurgence of “ethnic conflicts”, which presumably could be made irrelevant under different institutional arrangements and absent resurgence of New Enclosures..

Certainly, the above is by no means an exhausting genealogy of either “postcolonial” or (especially) anti-capitalist theory in the region, but rather an effort to tease out some tendential argumentative trajectories. More importantly still, what I seek to foreground in this section is the mutual unintelligibility and opacity between these two critical master discourses of the early transition. This mutual opacity is not only a by-product of different disciplinary preferences (usually human versus social sciences), methodological choices (a critique of representational discourses versus a critique of the political economy), and even personal and professional

<sup>\*</sup> Or, as Tamás puts it elsewhere, reasserting the core principles of the period: “Enlightenment is still unfinished, let alone socialism” (2015).

biographies (leftists in Eastern Europe to this day struggle to find secure academic positions). At a deeper theoretical level, the absence of dialogue, especially during this early phase of development of the postcolonial and anti-capitalist critiques, has everything to do with their divergent and even antithetical points of departure. For anti-capitalists such as Žižek and Tamás, as indicated above, the “false” universality of capitalism generates *necessarily* its own false particularity, by way of ethnicism and multicultural difference; and the only way of confronting it is via the “true” universality of liberation and its avatars (Communism, Christianity, the Enlightenment). In fact, there is only one true universality: that of equality, full citizenship, the “separation from one’s ethnic roots”, whereas the global (yet falsely universal) reach of capital is only a way of distributing particularities in a hierarchical way. For the likes of Wolff and Todorova, by contrast, it is that same “true” (Enlightenment) universality that has generated the “false” particularity of Eastern Europe/the Balkans, as a “demi-Orient” and “incomplete self” of the West respectively; and, if it is to be confronted at all, then this may only be done from the perspective of “historical specificity” and a strong sense of emplacement (what Todorova calls “the ontology of the Balkans”). The very Enlightenment that provides Žižek and Tamás with the resources for a radical turn turns out to also be the source of discourses of inferiorization and racialization, at least when viewed from a “postcolonial” angle. Apart from its liberatory and progressive agenda, the Enlightenment appears to have a “dark underside”, which is constitutive of its very essence.

## **Generation 2.0: from postcolonial to decolonial anti-capitalist critique**

Over the past decade and a half, however, scholars from the two sides of the divide have made important inroads toward a rapprochement “between the posts”. This “second generation” of critical theorists from the region not only do not see the critiques of capitalism and of colonialism/racial inferiorization as mutually exclusive, but even insist on their imbrication and mutual presupposition. In a recent text on socialist and postsocialist

TV for instance, media scholar Anikó Imre claims that while admission into the EU may have brought a better life “to a small well-educated, or wealthy East European elite, the majority of the postsocialist populations have become the losers of capitalism” leading to a resurgence of “nativist nationalisms” (Imre 2014: 118). Part of the logic of these nationalisms entails “*overidentifying* with the host [West European] culture and *outperforming* its whiteness – at the expense of racialized others” (2014: 131, *my italics*). In another highly suggestive text, Polish anthropologist Michał Buchowski marks an important shift in the deployment of orientalist categories to Central and Eastern Europe after the end of the Cold War. As postsocialist geopolitics scramble the spatial boundaries of the past, Buchowski traces how locally inferiorized populations of workers, peasants, and people with little education become targets of a “domestic orientalism”, in which “Otherness is dissected from an exotic context and brought home ... [and] the *spatially exotic other has been resurrected as the socially stigmatized brother*” (2006: 476).

But perhaps the most promising and suggestive line of development over the past decade or so has come from what has been called the “decolonial turn” in the human and social sciences. Also referred to as “decoloniality” or the “decolonial option”, the project draws on the pioneering work of Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano who at the turn of the 1990s coined the concept of “coloniality of power” to offer a *longue durée* perspective on global forms of domination. Quijano understands coloniality of power to be a constitutive axis of Western capitalist modernity, and defines it as “the imposition of a racial/ethnic classification of the global population as the cornerstone of that model of power... operat[ing] on every level, in every arena and dimension (both material and subjective) of everyday social existence” (2000: 342). First originating in the long 16<sup>th</sup> century of Western colonialism, the particular ending of the term (coloniality) is used to emphasize a structural logic of (economic, political, legal, cultural, epistemic, and other forms of) subordination that survives the end of formal colonial practices worldwide. While coloniality may have worked differently in different places (via extermination in the Americas, cultural subordination in Asia and the Middle East, and an intense cultural destruction in Africa), its lingering presence five hundred

years later necessitates that any project of liberation has an explicit decolonial dimension (2007: 169-170, 177).\*

Of particular interest here is the work of regional scholars who draw on (while also expanding and complicating) the resources of the decolonial turn. For example, Romanian sociologist Manuela Boatcă has suggested that the monolithic conception of Europe/the West that even post- and decolonial theory often posits fails to capture the complex dynamics of inferiorization operative within the European continent. Instead, Boatcă proposes a multiplication of the idea of Europe, to include what she calls decadent Europe (Spain and Portugal), heroic Europe (Germany, France, England), and epigonal Europe (the Balkan states).\*\* While decadent Europe was an early founding participant in the project of Western Modernity and heroic Europe its effective core producer, the epigonal Balkans have taken on the role of reproducer of modernity (and thereby an accomplice to coloniality), marked by an attitude of aspirational Europeanness/whiteness (Boatcă, 2012: 136; I return to this claim of complicity below). For Boatcă, the European continent is thus crisscrossed by various internal divisions as by-products of Western coloniality, including an *internal imperial difference* (between decadent and heroic Europe, from the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries) and an *external imperial difference* (between East and West, sometime after the 18<sup>th</sup> century). It is Eastern Europe's positioning on the external imperial difference that accounts both for its epigonal status and for its aspirationally white attitude (Boatcă, 2013). Importantly, this “in-between position [...] also entails an epistemic potential” (Boatcă, 2012: 139).

Similar to Boatcă's invitation that we consider thinking from “world regions” rather than just a more or less homogeneous world-system (Boatcă, 2013: 133), philosopher and social critic Ovidiu Țichindeleanu zones in on the epistemic potential of thinking from Eastern Europe. As he seeks to develop a “critical theory of the post-communist transition”, Țichindeleanu defines the latter

\* More recent contributors to the decolonial turn include authors such as Walter Mignolo, Sylvia Wynter, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, María Lugones, Xhercis Méndez, Arturo Escobar, Kelvin-Santiago-Valles, Catherine Walsh, Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez, Gloria Wekker, and others. A series of compound nouns have emerged in conversation with Quijano's original concept, such as coloniality of knowledge, of being, of gender, of language, of migration, etc.

\*\* More recently Boatcă (2017) has added a fourth “forgotten” Europe, that of Western Europe's former colonies, or the “unacknowledged borders in the Atlantic and the Caribbean Sea”.



as the top-down integration of Eastern European societies “into the world system of capitalism and into the Western hierarchy of knowledge systems” (2010: 87). Țichindeleanu is particularly insistent that such a theory has to consider the dual origins of the region, positioned on the semi-periphery of both global capitalism and global coloniality. Consequently, any project with a liberatory agenda in Eastern Europe cannot just take anti-capitalism (or post-/decoloniality) as its point of departure, but has to actively combat the joined forces of “anti-communism, Eurocentrism, and capitalocentrism” (Țichindeleanu, 2010). An important part of the project of developing a critical liberatory imaginary includes resignifying the material culture of Eastern European socialism, as it partially departed from the logics of both capitalist accumulation and colonial subordination. Referring to this material culture as the “secular cosmologies” of socialism (including a different conception of time, for instance the five-year plans, an ability to turn objective poverty into subjective wealth, the kitchen as a site of pluri-discursive encounters, etc.), Țichindeleanu (2013) proposes the development of a radical methodology “at the intersection of historical materialism with the decolonial option”.

The important contributions of scholars such as József Böröcz, Piro Rexhepi, Marina Gržinić, and Tjaša Kancler merit a special mention here as well. While Böröcz has explored, for nearly two decades now, the complex intermeshings of a transition to a neoliberal economy and a retrenchment of colonial patterns of domination in Europe (see e.g. Böröcz, 2001; Böröcz and Sarkar, 2017), including reading the EU’s “eastern enlargement” as a colonial project (Böröcz, 2001: 25), Rexhepi (2018) has studied Muslim communities and their contributions to global, and not just local, anti-colonial struggles (what he calls the “Muslim International”). But perhaps one of the most significant and pressing recent developments has been the still nascent corpus of decolonial feminist and queer/trans\* theorizing in the region. Bringing together scholar-activists whose “archive” spans the gamut from performance art to queer theory and from a critique of neoliberalism to women-of-colour feminisms, this critical scholarship adds crucial ingredients to radical theory and praxis in Eastern Europe. Rexhepi himself has discussed the colonial logic behind EU-sponsored discourses of queer rights in Kosovo, as they isolate local queer formations from other oppressed communities and erase the intersectional demographic of queer Muslims altogether (Rexhepi, 2016).

Drawing on women-of-colour, transfeminist, and lesbian theory, Marina Gržinić has called for the development of “dissident feminisms” that “disrupt the monolithic history of a feminism that is heterosexual and white” (2014: 1); and Tjaša Kancler (2018) has asked, as she seeks to rethink “trans\* politics and activism in relation to decoloniality”, what role Eastern Europeans can play in “the production of a trans\* imaginary in opposition to the mainstream (also transgender) visual codes”. Both Gržinić and Kancler have drawn on important work by Maria Lugones and Madina Tlostanova discussing the “coloniality of gender” and the need to free this category from its Eurocentric bias (Lugones, 2007; Tlostanova, 2010). If it is true that the postsocialist transition can also be viewed as a mode of “repatriarchalization” (Burcar, 2012), then Kancler’s (2018) appeal that “our feminist theorizing and practice should be articulated through the intensification of postsocialist and postcolonial dialogues in order to think about the new possibilities of building critical alliances transversally with a vision of pluriversal future” can be read as a programmatic statement of this type of intervention as well.

It is to this list of a new generation of post-/decolonial anti-capitalist scholarship that we should add the contributions of the authors included in this special issue. Certainly, the generational differences invoked here are not a simple product of a chronological sequence either, whereby one generation simply succeeds and displaces another (Böröcz’s text for instance was published only a year after Tamás’s *On Post-fascism*), but rather a question of different methodologies, sites of intervention, and even political agendas. In fact, especially with the decolonial feminist and trans\* theory in the region, it might make sense to speak of a third generation already. Perhaps more importantly, the theoretical and methodological contributions of this new generation of scholars allow us to take the conversation further, beyond the pitfalls of the “missed encounter” of the 1990s. Categories such as domestic Orientalism and imperial difference, epigonal Europe and secular cosmologies, Muslim International and dissident feminisms, provide important *conceptual advantages* and *bonus insights* for not only understanding the past and present of Eastern Europe, but also for orienting political action in the labyrinth of the postsocialist transition. Especially given the current state of affairs in the region and beyond, they have become indispensable tools for critical thought and political activism.

## On some bonus insights, at the intersection of decoloniality and anti-capitalism

Yet what are these bonus insights and conceptual advantages afforded by the new theory? How does the second generation of scholars and activists in the region avoid the limits and dead-ends that haunted the work of their predecessors? And how is the “decolonial turn” among leftist scholars in the region a step forward in orienting theoretical analysis and political action? I believe that we can identify at least four such *bonus insights* proffered by the decolonial anti-capitalist critique in particular (with the proviso that I do not hereby seek to dismiss postcolonial interventions at all, a gesture too frequent, unfortunately, among some of the Latin American decolonial theorists themselves) (see e.g. Mignolo 2011).

The *first* bonus insight has to do with the very concept of coloniality and its corollary, decoloniality. One of the major reasons behind Maria Todorova’s reluctance to embrace the language of postcoloniality in relation to the Balkans has to do with the absence of a colonial legacy in the region (unlike, for example, in Southeast Asia). For Todorova, this absence, along with that of a civilizing mission, of hegemonic cultural residue, and colonial subjectivity, makes an uncritical importation of postcolonial categories not only undesirable, but also theoretically (and perhaps even politically) problematic (Todorova, 2009: 195). In short, to Anne McClintock’s critique of postcolonial theory as as a “singular, monolithic term, organized around a binary axis of time rather than power” (McClintock, 1992: 294, *my italics*), Todorova adds the weight of a *spatial* difference of a territory outside the purview of Western colonialism. Yet the very definitional content of the concept of coloniality resolves Todorova’s concern, by in fact bypassing it altogether. While Aníbal Quijano and his interlocutors are very clear that coloniality of power was born with historical Western colonialism in the Americas and the African slave trade, they are also adamant that the new social totality that it set in place has always exceeded its immediate geographical boundaries. Coloniality (of power, but also of being/knowledge/gender/labour/etc.) not only survives the formal end of colonialism, but also transcends its territorial borders and direct sites of application. To the extent to which coloniality is a logic of political/economic/epistemic/

ontological inferiorization, its totalizing reach leaves no place untouched and no stone unturned. Eastern Europe, while formally never colonized by the West, is no exception to coloniality's logic of racial classification. Hence, while resisting coloniality's imposition in the region may be more aptly called "de-Occidentalization" than "decolonization" (see e.g. Țichindeleanu, 2013), this work of resistance has to be part and parcel of any project of liberation in this context.

The *second* bonus insight has to do with the concept of imperial difference and its relationship with the colonial difference. As discussed extensively by various authors, the colonial difference is a product of the long 16<sup>th</sup> century, setting the ground for both a Europe-dominated capitalist world-system and for the discourses of Western modernity (Quijano, 2007; Quijano and Wallerstein, 1992; Mignolo, 2011). It is also what paves the way for the construction of various internal differentiations within the European continent, by way of an internal (North-South) and external (East-West) imperial differences between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries (Wolff, 1994: 5). It is within this broader decolonial framework that (what we call today) Eastern Europe obtains its dual status, as both a semi-periphery to the capitalist world-system and as an aspirationally white/civilized part of colonial Europe. This process of emergence accounts for, on the one hand, the underdevelopment of the region as conditional upon and also a partial requirement for the (over)development of the West: from its exploitation as an agricultural semi-periphery of the West (Boatcă, 2006) to what Bulgarian scholar Rossen Vassiliev would call the "Third-Worldization" of the former (socialist) Second World (Vassiliev, 2010). On the other hand, it also provides a *longue durée* perspective for understanding representations of the region as refracted through discourses of "demi-Orientalization" and "Balkanism". If part of the challenge with authors such as Wolff, Abramovsky, and Todorova has to do with the difficulty of locating in their writing the "invention of Eastern Europe/the Balkans" as part of a broader pattern of racialization and inferiorization, then a decolonial anti-capitalist approach to the region helps position those discourses as part of the larger framework of global coloniality and its various "inventions" (of "the Americas", the "Orient", "Asia", "Eastern Europe", etc.). As Argentine philosopher Enrique Dussel

(2013) puts it, before the Second Modernity of the Enlightenment and of Orientalism (and also Balkanism, we may add), there was the First Modernity of Columbus and coloniality.

The *third* bonus insight or conceptual advantage takes us back to the basic premises of Quijano's coloniality of power (as well as to other, still underexplored, theories from the South such as Cedric Robinson's "racial capitalism", for instance). According to Quijano, coloniality constitutes one of the two structural axes of capitalism as a world-system, the other being Western modernity (Quijano, 200: 342). In fact, from a decolonial standpoint, different parts of the world can be seen as (also) including different configurations of those three basic terms: capitalism, modernity, and coloniality.\* This tripartite structure allows us to revisit what I identified as the mutual unintelligibility between the discourses of anti-capitalism and postcoloniality above, and not only in Eastern Europe. As Neil Lazarus among others has noted, postcolonial studies worldwide (at least in their mainstream incarnations) often display a "third world optic" whose sophisticated understanding of (post)colonialism shows little appreciation for dynamics of capitalist development (Lazarus, 2012: 120; see also Imre, 2014; Sinha, 2017).\*\* Within such an understanding, often too little is made of the fact that historical colonialism has also involved the imposition of a particular mode of production, specific regimes of accumulation and exploitation, the extraction of surplus value, etc. (Lazarus, 2012: 120). Analogously, if with a different emphasis, much of anti-capitalist theory (Marxism included) tends to be (often unabashedly) Eurocentric, privileging North Atlantic processes and practices as exemplary of both the logic of capitalism and the resistance against it. Along the way, leftist/Marxist theory has also found itself positioned at the tense intersection between capitalism and modernity – where the rhetoric and formal logics of modernity are both undermined by

\* I leave aside significant tensions here between decolonial thought and alternative meta-theoretical frameworks, such as Robinson's racial capitalism or the settler-colonialism model operative within indigenous scholarship in the United States, among other places. For more on the issue, see e.g. Robinson (2000), Wolfe (2006) and Tuck and Wayne Young (2012), among others.

\*\* Notably, important authors in this tradition, such as Spivak, Hall, the Subaltern Studies collective, and others, refuse to separate the logics of capitalism and (post)colonialism. Yet the travels and reception of postcoloniality, certainly in the West/Global North, often "forget" about capitalism altogether. I owe this nuance to conversations with Zhivka Valiavicharska; see also Karkov and Valiavicharska (2018) on this point.

capitalism and may also serve as a resource in its critique.\* One unfortunate consequence of such methodological choices is that postcoloniality often ignores or downplays the role of capitalist accumulation under colonialism or in the “post-colony” (Mbembe, 2001), while the anti-capitalist/Marxist critique frequently sees (post)colonialism/coloniality as either a distraction from or a mere epiphenomenon of a more fundamental conflict. In short, the postcolonial theorists tend to overlook capitalism, while the leftist scholars mostly miss out on coloniality.

In Eastern Europe, as I have argued above, a similar configuration obtains, as radical leftist theorists often reduce interethnic and religious tensions to a displacement of a more primary logic of capitalist accumulation and New Enclosures (the Commune v. multicultural differences), while local “postcolonial” scholars either dismiss the relevance of anti-capitalist critique altogether or choose to not get too deep into it.\*\* It is this mutual “forgetfulness” of capitalism and coloniality that, to my mind, accounts for the missed encounter of the 1990s. By contrast, it is the ability of the second generation of critical scholarship in the region to overcome that forgetfulness (by restoring the interrelationship between all three terms) that constitutes one of that scholarship’s seminal contributions. What is more, this second generation harkens back to Quijano’s original insight that the struggle is against *both* capitalism and coloniality (not just one or the other), and that resisting both may require drawing the resources of not only (Western) modernity.

Finally, Eastern European socialisms, including and especially during the Cold War, pose another set of challenges to totalizing metanarratives of global oppression. Indeed, the erasure of the role and contributions of the former

\* Marx himself presents an early case in point. His famous quip about capitalist exchange being about “Freedom, Equality, Property and Bentham” already points to a logic of utility (i.e. profit) as antithetical to the lofty rhetoric of modernity. On the other hand, the general outlines of Marx’s vision of a postcapitalist future more often than not draw on a version of radicalized modernity/Enlightenment.

\*\* Wolff and Todorova provide an example of each position. In what strikes me as an all-too-hasty dismissal of a whole theoretical framework, Wolff criticizes Wallerstein (and world-systems analysis) for suggesting that social and economic factors alone determined Western Europe’s construction of the East and for using the case of Poland as a synecdoche for the whole region. In turn, Maria Todorova acknowledges “Marx’s immense contribution to how we theorize about society” yet does not follow up on that comment in her discussion of Balkanism (Todorova, 2009: 7). For an important critique of deploying “postcolonial” categories to the context of former Yugoslavia without taking into account the socialist past, see Petrovič (2014).



Second World are not only a hallmark of much postcolonial theorizing, but of the majority of decolonial theory as well. As Madina Tlostanova has noted, in a recent interview, “[m]odernity in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was implemented in two forms – the liberal/capitalist and the socialist/statist one. Each of them had its own kind of coloniality” (Tlostanova, 2013). Implicit within such a perspective is the idea that there weren’t any substantive differences between the two types of modernity/coloniality: the socialist and the capitalist one. Yet, the historical record points to a far messier and complex reality than that of two symmetrical colonial projects. Far from being just an epigonal reproducer of modernity and an accomplice to coloniality (Boatcă, 2013), Eastern European socialist societies played a far more ambiguous role with respect to both global capitalism and global coloniality. Their positioning on the semi-periphery of the modern-colonial capitalist world-system allowed them, at times, to at least partially depart from its logics.

The relationship between the former Second and Third Worlds has been a subject of numerous studies, but it is worth attending here to some of the complexities of this relationship. For instance, “Third-World” students coming to study in the “Socialist East” may have often been subject to discrimination, denied apartments, and may have even suffered racial abuse (Subotić and Vučetić, 2018), yet literally hundreds of thousands of them attended universities all across the socialist bloc, on full scholarships, as part of a framework of international solidarity with African and Latin American societies (see e.g. Kídrinova, 2018). While most of these students would later return to their countries of origin, they were not just passive recipients but rather “agents of change and modernization” for the duration of their studies, including in their temporary communities of residence (Popescu, 2014: 94). There certainly was “the well-established academic discipline of ‘orientalism’ in Communist countries” (Mark and Slobodian, 2018: 14-15), but there were also institutions such as “The Friendship University, also known as Lumumba University, an institution dedicated to serving the educational needs of young intellectuals in the third world”, along with “less structured yet functional [educational] agreements” in countries such as the GDR, Poland, Hungary, or Romania (Popescu, 2014: 95). Throughout the Cold War, socialist Eastern Europe also provided technical and material (and also military) aid, often at an economic loss, to help design local infrastructure

in various countries in Africa and the Middle East, from roads to hospitals, and from dams to national theaters (Mayer, 2016: 61). While by the 1980s much of that “aid” may have looked like a case of “instrumentalizing decolonization” (Mark and Slobodian, 2018: 10), only a decade and a half earlier collaborative discussions among the Non-Aligned Movement states (Yugoslavia included) had helped craft a notion of “collective self-reliance” as a long-term process that would redefine trade patterns “with economic co-operation between developing countries as a way of *bolstering each other’s share in world trade*” ((quoted in Spaskovska, 2018: 5)). The often highly impactful collaborations between women’s organizations in Africa and Eastern Europe is well-documented by contemporary scholars as well, as a rich archive of collective fights against multiple oppressions, including the patriarchy of the socialist state (Ghodsee, 2014; Popa, 2009); as have been various artistic projects such as the Tashkent Film Festival, bringing together African, Asian, and later Latin American filmmakers (Djagalov and Salaskina, 2016). And the list of course goes on and on.\*

I have purposefully organized the above examples as a sort of dialectical “montage of opposites”, to foreground the now complicit, now resistant relationship of East European socialism to both capitalism and coloniality. While Eastern European socialisms and their institutions may not have gone far enough in challenging global white supremacy (Subotić and Vučetić, 2018), the spaces for collaboration and transformation that they helped open up often did not fall neatly within its purview either, but rather departed, at least in part, from some of its basic premises. What is more, just as projects such as the ones listed above were often, at least in their conception, state-sponsored, organized along a top-down chain of command, and couched in the condescending terms of aid rather than international solidarity, what the individual organizations, intellectuals and activists, or even local communities involved did as they unfolded was often quite a different story, as evidenced for example by women’s and Muslim community organizing in the region see e.g. Ghodsee, 2014; Rexhepi, 2018). Lastly, there is the no small matter of different historical periods and different socialist societies as well, putting to bed the fantasy

\* For a more extensive discussion of this point, see Karkov and Valiavicharska (2018). I owe this final bonus insight and much of its supporting bibliography to discussions with Zhivka Valiavicharska and Tanja Petrović.

of a (totalitarian) socialism writ large. What was happening in Soviet Russia in the 1930s was by no means comparable to Yugoslavia in the 1970s, nor were the foreign relations of the last decade of state socialism taking place in even neighbouring Romania and Bulgaria for instance. All of this opens up important questions of periodization, historical location, and the overall heterogeneity of the socialist experience.

But to return to the bigger point being made here, this *fourth* bonus insight not only informs a number of projects within the nascent literature of decolonial anti-capitalist scholarship in Eastern Europe (including this issue). Arguably, it also constitutes one of the most original contributions that the Eastern European scholars make to decolonial theory more broadly, by proposing historically existing socialism as an irreducible *fourth* term to the original tripartite structure of capitalism and its two constitutive axes: (Western) modernity and global coloniality. Just as Eastern European leftist intellectuals and activists may have much to learn from a robust engagement with the insights of post- and decolonial theory as repurposed in a regional context, part of the “epistemic potential” of thinking from Eastern Europe includes challenging the partial myopia of the (Latin American) decolonial scholarship on this crucial, yet often neglected, point. Not fitting easily into any totalizing account of the modern world, including from the Global South, Eastern European socialism poses anew the vexing question of the relationship between “local histories” and “global designs” (Mignolo, 2000), this time from the semi-periphery of the capitalist world-system.

## **To conclude – or, perhaps, to continue...**

In an important gathering among activists of colour in London in 1990, West German participant Sheila Mysorkar had the following to say when reflecting upon the promises and perils of the fall of the Berlin Wall: “Because the borders will be opened between us it will be for one people only: we can see now between East Germany and West Germany, the borders are open for white people only. And I think we have to be aware altogether that Europe will really be shut off against African and Asia” (La Rose et al., 1991: 31). Nearly a generation after that famous “Fall” (pun intended), we can only

marvel at the insight and far-sightedness of activists such as Mysorkar, as they saw that what looked like liberation to some only promised the multiplication of borders for others. Eastern European societies and their members have been assigned their own particular role in the process: from policing the eastern-most frontiers of “Fortress Europe” to increasingly assuming themselves the role of the “racialized migrant” when moving West (Veliković, 2012: 170). Perhaps it is time we started listening – to those among whom it is high time we started looking for new (and also old) allies.

In what is soon to be the 30th anniversary of the counter-revolutions of 1989, East European societies are increasingly faced with the false choice between nativist and racist (if not outright fascist) nationalisms and the abstract universality of liberal democracy as a screen for capitalist accumulation and dispossession. In the exigency of the moment, a “simple” return to working-class politics, no matter how robust, may not do: class in Eastern Europe (as anywhere else) has always been “complicated” by the intermeshed logics of racialization, sexualization, gendering, etc., in ever new configurations of power. In a context where the workings of coloniality and capitalism continue to pose immense challenges to radical action, a (continued) sustained dialogue between radical theories from the South and our own traditions of anti-capitalist radicalism is as pressing as ever. Some 38 years ago Jürgen Habermas famously proclaimed modernity to be an unfinished project; to which the decolonial response has been that the process of decolonization, rather (Western) modernity, is the project in need of completion (Maldonado-Torres, 2011: 2). The epistemic potential of thinking from Eastern Europe suggests that it is the work of dialoguing between the South and the East, attempted and initiated at multiple times but far from completed, that continues to be one of the pressing tasks of the day. Much like the original Belgrade conference in 2017, it is this sense of pressing urgency that motivates the present special issue as well.

***Bibliography*** ➤



GLOBAL ENTRY

PASSPORT



# Coloniality of citizenship and Occidentalist epistemology

**Manuela Boatcă**



**A** growing number of Western states currently scandalize the claims to residence and citizenship of people racialized as non-European, non-Western, or non-white.\* Many such states increasingly denounce or block illegalized migrant paths to residence and further restrict the rights and the duration of refugees' presence on their territory. Such measures painfully reveal the rising importance of unequal citizenships for global mobility, and of unequal rights more generally. Yet, they (should) also alert us to the larger role that citizenship as an institution plays in constructing and maintaining the idea of a modern West, whose integrity allegedly needs preserving, protecting, and shielding from presumably unfathomable non-Western Others. Provincializing the epistemologies behind this understanding is therefore a necessary first step on a pathway towards decoloniality. In the following, I trace the dominant view of modern citizenship back to Occidental epistemologies championed by sociology's classics, especially Max Weber, in order to show how it continues to shape the coloniality of citizenship within the privileged context of Europe today.

The starting point of such provincialization is realizing that we owe much of our understanding of citizenship to the canonized classics of the social sciences that upheld the notion of a uniquely innovative West that generated – and generalized – progressive institutions. Especially due to sociological conceptualizations, citizenship has for a long time been understood as an equalizing mechanism – an institution devised to counterbalance social inequalities by conferring universal rights to all individuals, regardless of particularities of birth such as ethnicity, class, or social origin. At the global level, the Western notion of citizenship has, however, been functioning as a selection mechanism on the basis of race, gender, literacy, and property status ever since its emergence in the context of the French Revolution (Boatcă, 2015). Its juxtaposition with religion more generally, and with Western Christianity in particular, has served as a hotbed of racist gestures and practices of exclusion even before citizenship crystallized as an institution: from the expulsion of both Jews and Muslims from the Iberian Peninsula after the conquest of Granada in 1492 and the use of the “Christianizing

\* This article draws on the concept of coloniality of citizenship first developed in Boatcă (2016) and reproduces parts of the arguments on Max Weber's theory of race and ethnicity, as well as on Occidentalism and unequal Europes developed in Boatcă (2013) and (2015), respectively.

mission” to justify European colonialism in the Americas, Asia, and Africa while denying rights to the natives; to the denial of citizenship rights to Jewish residents through most of Europe before 1848 and the Catholic-led initiative of inscribing the “Christian roots of Europe” into the European Union constitution in 2004; up to the exclusion of veiled Muslim women from naturalization ceremonies and citizenship in France in recent years, US President Donald Trump’s attempted ban on immigration from Muslim-majority countries, and several Eastern European countries’ refusal to accept Muslim refugees and migrants under the European Union’s solidarity allocation system in 2017.

In this context, revisiting the role that the classics of sociology have played in promoting a notion of Western modernity heavily linked to both Christianity and citizenship is especially revealing. In particular, Max Weber’s systematic focus on the uniqueness of the West, his definition of citizenship as a modern institution characteristic of Western Europe and anchored in Christianity, and what he viewed as the incompatibility of non-Western, non-Christian, and non-European peoples with such modern social patterns have left an enduring mark on sociology’s conceptualization of citizenship. The next sections thus first reconstruct central arguments made in the wake of Weber’s sociology with regard to the racialization of citizenships, both within and outside of Europe. Subsequently, arguments present in today’s debates about citizenship and migration in and from (South) Eastern Europe are discussed in light of the Occidental epistemology espoused in the dominant understanding of citizenship. Finally, global perspectives on the link between citizenship and growing worldwide inequalities are employed in order to reveal the character of inherited property that has recently turned citizenship into a commodity unequally, but fervently, employed by peripheral and semi-peripheral states in order to counterbalance inequality relations. The article ends with a reflection on the role of Southeastern Europe in the current renegotiations – both economic and epistemic – of European citizenship.

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## Uniqueness of the West: Writing non-Christian religions out of the history of modernity

Charges of Eurocentrism, evolutionary determinism, and ignorance of non-Western contexts have repeatedly been directed at most of sociology's classics. Yet, it was with reference to Max Weber's thesis of the "uniqueness of the West" that the notion of a Western sociology actively producing absences was first coined.

To Max Weber, explaining the origin of the West's uniqueness in bringing about modernity was central to excluding – or explaining away – any contributions of non-Western and/or non-Christian thought to what he considered to be modern achievements – in particular, scientific rationality. Similarly, only "rudimentary developments" of the state as a political institution operating on the basis of "a rationally enacted 'constitution' and rationally enacted laws" (Weber, 2005: 55) had crystallized outside the West, where these distinguishing features now characterized the modern state. The singularity of the West in all these regards could not be overstated, as Weber stressed in *General Economic History*:

*Only the Occident knows the state in the modern sense, with a constitution, specialized officialdom, and the concept of citizenship. Beginnings of this institution in antiquity and in the Orient were never able to develop fully. Only the Occident knows rational law, made by jurists and rationally interpreted and planned, and only in the Occident is found the concept of citizen (civis romanus, citoyen, bourgeois) because only in the Occident does the city exist in the specific sense of the word (Weber, 1961: 232).*

Weber offered a theory of Western exceptionalism based on what Johannes Fabian has called the "denial of coevalness": "a discourse that consistently places those who are talked about in a time other than that of the one who talks" (Fabian, 2006: 143). The Other, in this case, is the entire non-Western world. In stating that neither the modern state nor the concept of citizenship could have emerged elsewhere, Weber employs the typical Orientalist gesture involved in the denial of coevalness as a rationalization of the conspicuous absence of modern capitalist traits outside the West.

His analysis in *The City* uses the same Orientalist rhetoric of deficits grounded in non-Christian religions in order to explain that the Western concept of the citizen either never developed in the Orient or existed only in rudiments there (1978: 227). From among the five common features that he identified as characteristic of the European city,\* many were present in India, China, Judea, and the Middle East, as Weber himself acknowledged. Yet, he considered that it had been the associational character of the Occidental city, modelled on and mediated by the Christian congregation, that had brought forth the modern concept of the citizen (see Isin, 2003; Domingues, 2000). Since full membership in the ecclesiastic community was the prerequisite for urban citizenship, the fully developed ancient and medieval city of the West was first and foremost a sworn confraternity of individual “burghers” (i.e., people enjoying a citizen-like status within a given town or city) (Weber, 1978: 1246). For Weber, the decisive thrust toward confraternization (i.e., the crossing of religious boundaries) into a city corporation had come from Christianity and its unique quality of dissolving clan ties by replacing the ritual character of religious affiliation with a voluntary principle: “[...] by its very nature, the Christian congregation was a religious association of individual believers, not a ritual association of clans” (Weber, 1978: 1247). Weber thus traced the key element accounting for the rise of the modern citizenry as far back as early Christianity’s overcoming of ritual taboos between members of different religious communities: “For, without commensalism – in Christian terms, without the Lord’s Supper – no oathbound fraternity and no medieval urban citizenry would have been possible” (Weber, 1917: 37, quoted in Isin, 2003).

Conversely, in the case of Judaism, the absence of commensalism, alongside the ritual exclusion of connubium, or religious intermarriage, had effectively prevented fraternization between Jews and non-Jews in the medieval cities, resulting in the exclusion of the former from the developing “burgher” associations. In his comparative studies, Weber acknowledged similarities between all other aspects of city formation in the West, on the one hand, and Chinese, Indian, Japanese, or Near Eastern urban settlements, on the other. Nevertheless, he repeatedly concluded that ritual obstacles

\* I.e., fortification, market, autonomous justice, associative structure, and autocephaly.

to confraternization – stronger in the case of the Indian castes than for the Chinese and Near Eastern sibs – had accounted for the divergence between East and West in the long run.

Against competing explanations of the time that traced the emergence of capitalism to economic, technological, or demographic factors, or to an immanent process of social evolution, Weber argued that a work ethic based on *ideas* such as that of “a duty of the individual toward the increase of his capital, which is assumed as an end in itself” (Weber 1992: 17) and “[t]he earning of money [as] the result and the expression of virtue and proficiency in a calling” (Weber 1992: 19), was what lent Western European and US American capitalism its distinct rationality and what had been missing in earlier forms of capitalism. Weber traced the “*ethically*-oriented maxim for the organisation of life” back to the basic religious ideas of ascetic Protestantism, seen as constituting the very *spirit* of modern capitalism (Weber, 1992: 48). He famously viewed the relationship between the Protestant ethic and the early capitalist institutions originating in the European cities as an “elective affinity” between a type of religious-ethically motivated conduct and a mode of production, rather than a direct cause (Weber, 1978: vol. 1; Schluchter, 2007: 82).

The logic of “elective affinities” between the religious conduct of Western urban middle-classes and the emergence of capitalism thus offers a basis for writing non-Christian religions out of the history of modernity. While Christianity and Judaism had in common an origin as specifically bourgeois religions, Weber argues, Islam and all Asiatic denominations emerged as religions of the ruling stratum and as such lacked the middle-class, urban character of the Western capitalist ethos. In particular, the inner-worldly warrior ethic characteristic of Islam, upheld by a status-oriented military aristocracy, only promoted heroic self-sacrifice in times of war, but not the long-term vocational asceticism that had allowed Protestantism to overcome the spirit of traditionalism in the economic and political spheres (Schluchter, 2007: 80). In Weber’s view, if Judaism never transcended the economic ethic of early, “pariah capitalism”, Islam remained feudal, petty bourgeois, or booty capitalist at best. Once again, the Orientalist rhetoric of lack actively produced absences in societies defined as non-modern. Moreover, the elevation



of feudalism – a particular period in the history of some parts of Western Europe – to a universal stage in the history of world civilizations lent legitimacy to the search for structural absences outside the West and projected its postulated uniqueness further back in time.

## **The “Polish Question” and the racialization of European citizenships**

The rise of imperial Germany rendered most of the concepts Weber coined for understanding inequality relations both within and across nations almost instantly obsolete (Wenger, 1980: 373). The medieval estates were disappearing; industrialization attracted large flows of labour migrants from the European East, while the local labour force was ever more proletarianized. European colonialism in Africa prompted an increased awareness of “the Other” that translated as the infamous anthropological distinction between European *Kulturvölker* (culture peoples) and colonized *Naturvölker* (nature peoples), in turn associated with different degrees of humanity. Growing anti-Semitism was reflected in allegedly scientific support of racial concepts of German national identity as distinct from a Jewish race (Zimmerman, 2001: 242). With Germany’s unification in 1871, existing anti-Catholic sentiments were institutionalized in Bismarck’s *Kulturkampf* (culture struggle) policies, which meant to restrict the power of the Catholic Church and to define Germany as a secular state. As a result, the increasing presence of Catholic Poles in Eastern Germany was officially countered through the resettlement of German farmers in the region. The conservative *Verein für Sozialpolitik* (officially, German Economic Association; literally, Association for Social Policy), which Weber joined in 1888, had until then supported the Prussian state’s resettlement policies only on class terms, i.e., as a means of preventing the further proletarianization of German farmers and an impending social revolution. It was Max Weber whose work in the *Verein* first made ethnic and cultural explanations central to the discussions of the Prussian East and who warned of the “danger of assimilation” from the standpoint of “reason of state” rather than an economic one (Zimmerman, 2006: 61; 2010: 100).

These views resonated in his further works in ways eerily similar to today's migration debates. Central to Weber's controversial\* inaugural lecture at the University of Freiburg (1895), entitled "Nationality in Economic Policy", was the question "What social strata are the repositories of Germanism (*Deutschtum*) and Polonism (*Polentum*) in the country districts?" (Weber, 1980: 429). The systematic land purchase by the German state, the settlement of German farmers on Polish-owned land, as well as the closing of the German frontier to Polish workers had been part of Bismarck's official program of "Germanization" of the Eastern provinces up to 1890, in which suppressing "Polonism" was an explicit goal. Weber was therefore employing known terms in order to address a familiar problem: the decline of the German land-worker population in the face of Polish settlement on small farms and growing imports of cheap Polish labour on large estates. What was new, both with respect to the general discussion and to Weber's earlier treatments of the issue, was the phrasing of these *economic* developments in *ethnic* and *cultural* terms derived from each of the groups' religious affiliations. Since the census data available to him only differentiated by religion, not ethnicity, Weber interpreted the numbers indicating the decline of the Protestant population relative to the Catholic one to mean that it must be German day-labourers who are moving out of the estates on good soil, and that Polish peasants proliferating on low-quality land.\*\* He traced this tendency back to "*a lower expectation of living standards*, in part physical, in part mental, which the Slav race either possesses as a gift from nature or has acquired through breeding in the course of its past history" (Weber, 1980: 432).

The Polish peasants, unlike the seasonal migrant workers, were German citizens at the time. Yet, Weber described the situation as an economic struggle "between nationalities" (1980: 428), ultimately decided through a selection process in favour of the nationality with the greater "ability to adapt" to given economic and social conditions. In his view, the Polish peasants

\* Although Max Weber himself has later expressed misgivings about aspects of his lecture, they did not refer to his upholding of the German nation, which is the focus of the following summary (see Abraham, 1991: 47; Roth, 1993).

\*\* Weber was of course aware of the methodological short-circuit inherent in using religion as a proxy for nationality, but decided that "only approximate accuracy" is good enough in the case of West Prussia, where religious affiliation "coincides within a few percent with nationality" (1980: 429).

living off subsistence production, i.e., not affected by price fluctuations on the market, were better adapted than the economically “more gifted” German farmers:

*The small Polish peasant in East Germany is a type far removed from the bustling peasant owner of a dwarf property, whom one may see here in the well-favored valley of the Rhine as he forges links with the towns via greenhouse cultivation and market-gardening. The small Polish peasant in East Germany gains more land because he, as it were, eats the very grass from off of it, he gains not despite but on account of the low level of his physical and intellectual habits of life“ (Weber, 1980: 434).*

Weber thus used the social Darwinist terminology of “adaptation”, “selection process”, and “race breeding” popular at the time in order to explain that a group’s economic advance did not necessarily correlate with the “political maturity” needed in order to build up “the nation’s power”. Thus, Polish settlement and labour migration led to the rise of “unviable Slav hunger colonies” (Weber, 1980: 435) and drove out German agricultural labourers, instead of steering in the direction of the emergence of a strong proletariat on the model of England. The wish to protect “the German character of the East” (ibid.: 437) from such tendencies in turn led Weber to formulate his policy demands “from the standpoint of Germanism” and uphold “a German standard of value” against the international standards of social justice that he saw political economy as promoting:

*The science of political economy is a political science. It is a servant of politics, not the day-to-day politics of the individuals and classes who happen to be ruling at a particular time, but the lasting power-political interests of the nation. And for us the national state is not, as some people believe, an indeterminate entity [...], but the temporal power-organization of the nation, and in this national state the ultimate standard of value for economic policy is “reason of state”. (Weber, 1980: 438)*

Speaking at the close of the 19th century as a German economic theorist, a member of the bourgeois classes, and a son of a National Liberal member

of the Prussian Diet,\* Weber considered the “reason of state” in the case of German economic policy to be “the amount of elbow room” conquered for the economic well-being of “the race of the future” (Weber, 1994: 16). He therefore called for the renewed closing of the Eastern frontier to Polish migrants, as under Bismarck, and for a state policy of systematic colonization by German peasants on suitable land, as a means of preserving German culture – echoed today in calls for a *Leitkultur*.

This culturally racializing logic was not restricted to the European East. Tellingly for its roots in global coloniality, it also underlay Weber’s 1894 article on Argentina’s rising cereal exports after the devaluation of the Argentine peso in 1889/90. In arguing both against the free trade doctrine and the “entirely unrealistic assumption of the international equality of cultures” (MWG, 1993: 302), Weber insisted that Argentina’s low production costs could to a great extent be traced back to the very low wages and cheap food that planters offered the “nomadic barbarians” that they hired for seasonal work. According to their “low living standard”, these workers “appear when the time for demand comes and disappear afterwards or after having drunk away their wages”, while “in terms of housing [they] only know clay huts” (MWG, 1993: 292). Economic competition with colonial economies such as the Argentinean one would therefore require *lowering* the level of German social organization and culture in order to match that of Argentina’s “half-savage trash” (MWG, 1993: 129), a phenomenon Weber saw as occurring with the Polish immigration in East Elbia (the name given until World War II to the parts of the German Reich that lay east of the river Elbe):

*Should we be able and willing to work just as “cheaply”, our rural workers would have to approach this type as well, and we can indeed find the first manifestations of this change if we observe the itinerant workforce and the import of Poles in the East. Briefly, the fact is that we are an old sedentary civilized people (Kulturvolk) on densely populated land with an old, highly distinctive and therefore sensitive social organization and typical national cultural necessities, which make it impossible for us to compete with these economies (MWG, 1993: 298).*

\* For an assessment of the significance of Weber’s family history for a broader understanding of his intellectual and political concerns, see Guenther Roth’s 1993 review of volume 4 of the Max Weber Gesamtausgabe (Roth, 1993).

Inherent in Weber's defense of the "standpoint of Germanism" is therefore a colonial stance linking ethnicity to different cultural levels and the attitudes toward work of distinct "nationalities" that goes beyond the colonial discourse of his time. In arguing this position, Weber even turned against close collaborators: at the 1896 founding meeting of the National Social Party, Weber cautioned its founder, Friedrich Naumann, that the new party's political platform required adopting a *national* stance with respect to the Polish question. On such occasions, his anti-Polish rhetoric acquired clear racist traits and an unmistakable colonial logic: "It has been said that we have degraded the Poles to second-class German citizens. The opposite is the case: We have turned them into human beings in the first place" (MWG, I/4: 622). Clearly, Weber used the distinction between *Kulturvölker* as civilized humanity and *Naturvölker* as barbaric humanity that he had explicitly mobilized in reference to the German versus the Argentinean economies (and that was commonly used in 19th century German anthropology to refer to European and colonized peoples, respectively) in order to deny full humanity to populations within Europe. The modern, the civilized, and the rational are thereby confined to an even more exclusive space within the European continent, which the imperial imaginary conceives as ending at Germany's eastern border. Elsewhere, I have labeled this self-defined Western space "heroic Europe" and contrasted it to its internal Other, "epigonal Europe" in the (South)East of the continent. The latter is defined in Occidentalist terms via its alleged lack of the former's achievements and hence as a mere *re-producer* of the stages covered by the heroic Europe (Boatcă, 2010; 2013; 2015; see Karkov in this issue).

## **Occidentalist epistemology as the rhetoric of failure**

This type of argument focused on a positively connoted Western uniqueness still dominates sociological scholarship on the emergence of modern patterns of social stratification, citizenship rights, and democratic ideals in the West. In particular, Weber's interpretation of citizenship as a distinctly Western institution has been viewed as inaugurating "a social science tradition where the origins of 'city', 'democracy' and 'citizenship' are etymologically

traced to the ‘Greek’, ‘Roman’ and ‘medieval’ cities and affinities between ‘ancient’ and ‘modern’ practices are established and juxtaposed against oriental ones – Indian, Chinese and Islamic – as societies that failed to develop citizenship and hence indigenous capitalism” (Isin, 2013: 117). Talcott Parsons, who translated Weber into English and explicitly drew on his work, famously referred to the institutionalization of the basic rights of citizenship as an egalitarian tendency of modern societies, in which universalistic norms gradually replace earlier particularistic solidarities of ethnicity, religion, and regional origin. In Parson’s view, this tendency stood for a shift from traditional societies governed by criteria ascribed at birth, such as gender, race or family background, to modern societies characterized by achievement criteria such as educational or professional qualification. The decisive thrust for the implementation of this shift had come from the French Revolution (Parsons, 1971). At the same time, Parsons echoed Weber’s emphasis on confraternization as a basis for claims to equality when stressing that the French Revolution’s slogan “embodied the new conception of community. *Liberté* and *Egalité* symbolised the two foci of dissatisfaction, political authoritarianism and privilege; *Fraternité* referred primarily to the broader context of belonging, ‘brotherhood’ being a primordial symbol of community” (Parsons, 1971: 80). Again, both these accomplishments and the disparities that they addressed were presented as internal to a minimally defined West.

At the end of the 20th century, Bryan Turner, too, viewed citizenship as “an essentially modern institution which reflects the profound changes which have occurred in western societies following the democratic revolutions in France and America and as a consequence of broader, more general social changes associated with the industrial revolution, such as urbanisation and secularisation” (Turner and Hamilton, 1994: n.p.). He therefore envisaged an ideal-typical historical trajectory, whereby citizenship “evolves through the establishment of autonomous cities, develops through the emergence of the nation-state in the 18th and the 19th centuries, and finds its full blossoming in the welfare states of the 20th century” (Turner and Hamilton, 1994: n.p.).

Besides cementing the Orientalist construction of a binary opposition between East and West, such Weberian analyses of citizenship amount to inventing a unified and coherent tradition for each space:

*a superior way of being political as “simple and pure citizen” and an inferior tradition that never sorted out the contractual state or the citizen. For much of Occidental social science as well as political and public discourse, such images are now such ways of seeing: that democracy was invented in the Greek polis; that the Roman republican tradition bequeathed its legacy to Europe and that Europe Christianized and civilized these traditions (Isin, 2013: 117).*

Inevitably, such a procedure systematically encounters incomplete assignments and rudimentary developments everywhere outside the West, where a whole different set of socio-political, economic, and cultural elements was at play.

Ultimately, a Weberian conceptualization of citizenship, focused on Western Europe’s pioneering role in forging a community of equal members, channels attention to processes internal to that community and the features that make it unique in comparison to its counterparts elsewhere. Such a focus however prevents both an understanding of the interrelations – including relations of power such as colonial conquest, imperial rule, or religious and racial exclusion, which made the singularity of the original context possible – and precludes a global perspective on citizenship more generally. In the process, an inward-looking and self-sufficient West that needs to protect its borders from non-Western Others is being reproduced as legitimate, while religiously-motivated and racially-charged exclusion is disguised as universal epistemology.

## **Citizenship as entail of colonial property**

In turn, global perspectives reveal the ascribed characteristic of citizenship to be as important for worldwide stratification as class, and hence a crucial driver of international migration and worldwide social mobility (Korzeniewicz and Moran, 2009). In her 2009 book *The Birthright Lottery: Citizenship and Global Inequality*, legal scholar Ayelet Shachar has traced the Western institution of citizenship back to the feudal entail, a legal mechanism of restricting future succession of property to the descendants of a designated



estate-owner, which was widely used in medieval England. The entail of property offered a tool to preserve land in the hands of dynastic families by entrenching birthright succession and forbidding future generations to alter the estate inherited from their predecessors. It was this *feudal* institution that, according to Shachar's analysis, shaped the *modern* principle of citizenship allocation of Western European states in both *jus soli* and *jus sanguinis* arrangements. The entail of citizenship helped preserve the state's wealth in the hands of designated "heirs of membership titles" – the state's citizens – by allocating political membership at birth in dramatically different opportunity structures and excluding non-citizens from the same opportunities (Shachar, 2009: 38). The very modernity that Parsons associated with a shift away from ascribed characteristics is thereby revealed to rely on the ascription of citizenship at birth, thus providing (at least in principle) equal rights within the national territory, but creating stark inequalities for those remaining outside the territory to which these rights apply.

This reconceptualization sheds new light on the global workings of the institution of modern citizenship from its very emergence in the context of the French Revolution: on the one hand, the gradual extension of citizenship rights from propertied white males to all white males and to white women accounted for a decrease in inequality within continental France as of the 18th century. On the other hand, the categorical exclusion of the French colonies' non-white population from French citizenship, irrespective of their property status, ensured the maintenance of high inequality between France and Saint-Domingue/Haiti, as well as between other Western colonial powers and their colonial possessions more generally. It thus becomes clear that the entail of property that Shachar used as an analogy to the entail of citizenship was a colonial entail. Both the entail of property and the colonial entail of citizenship helped preserve inherited property: in the form of material goods proper and of *rights to* goods, state support, social services, and infrastructure in the hands of the (racially, ethnically, and geopolitically) designated heirs to the Western colonial enterprise for several centuries. Today,

*for individuals without birthright privilege in an affluent democracy, immigration provides a possible way to attain the precious and globally scarce good of citizenship in a stable and well-off polity. It thus opens the gate that typically remains sealed by birthright entails (Shachar, 2009: 83).*

At the same time, upper class membership comes with the significant benefit of being able to sidestep both ascription of citizenship at birth and actual migration. Resorting to market mechanisms in order to elude this ascription is therefore an increasingly visible, yet rare option available only to the wealthy few, who are however rarely described as migrants and more often as “global investors”, “expats”, or “foreign residents for tax purposes”. The growing commodification of citizenship rights across the world in recent years, i.e., the possibility of literally purchasing residence and citizenship in certain countries makes the similarity between citizenship and the entail of property particularly salient. It also prompts the realization that the ascription of citizenship represents no exception to a modern trend away from ascriptive mechanisms (Brubaker, 1992; Korzeniewicz and Moran, 2009; Shachar, 2009), but a core principle of global stratification in the capitalist world-economy.

Conferring citizenship to investors, provided they take up residence in a country’s territory, has been common practice in a number of states, including the UK, the US, Canada, Belgium, and Australia. A less common, but recently growing practice consists of extending citizenship status to investors without a residence requirement, i.e., they neither have to move to the country of their new citizenship, nor reside there for a given amount of time. Firmly implemented in Saint Kitts and Nevis and the Commonwealth of Dominica since 1984 and 1993 respectively, such so-called citizenship by investment (or “economic citizenship”) programmes have recently proliferated throughout Southern and Eastern Europe (for a recent overview see Carrera, 2014; Dzankic, 2015).

As a type of a naturalization procedure, citizenship by investment programmes have a clearly economic rationale and stand in close connection to the logic of coloniality. On the one hand, states employ them as an alternative development strategy or as a means of coping with the global financial crisis. For their very first promoters, the programmes were meant to

bridge the transition from the export monoculture of the colonial economy to the more diversified production after independence: Saint Kitts and Nevis, a federation of two islands in the Caribbean, established its programme one year after the islands gained independence from the United Kingdom in 1983. Initially, investment required to obtain citizenship was limited to a real estate option of 400,000 US dollars. After the islands' sugar industry was closed under the pressures from the European Union and the World Trade Organization, a second option was introduced in the form of a donation to the Sugar Industry Diversification Foundation (SIDF), a charity aimed at conducting research into the development of alternative industries to replace the sugar industry (Dzankic, 2012). Under the headline *Passports... for a Price*, Reuters pithily summarized the colonial logic behind the move towards investment citizenship by noting: "For decades, the two-island nation of Saint Kitts and Nevis exported sugarcane to keep its economy afloat. When sugar prices fell, Saint Kitts began to sell an even sweeter commodity: its citizenship" (Abrahamian, 2012).

Similarly, the Commonwealth of Dominica, which gained independence from the United Kingdom in 1978, has established an investor citizenship programme after adverse weather conditions and the decrease in the world prices of bananas, the country's primary crop, that had seriously damaged its economy (Dzankic, 2012). On the other hand, for the targeted investors, the economic rationale resides in the fact that, due to their conditions of former British colonies, both Saint Kitts and Nevis and Dominica are part of the Commonwealth of Nations. Their citizens can travel without a visa to more than half of the world's countries, including Canada and all of Europe. They pay no personal income taxes and can take up residence in any of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) member countries at any time and indefinitely.

Within Southern and Eastern Europe, citizenship and residency programmes have taken hold especially as a result of the 2008 financial crisis and the austerity measures imposed by the EU, the European Central Bank, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The programmes' economic rationale has therefore largely lain in providing a type of austerity management by refinancing debt through the sale of South Eastern European countries' own inherited property, citizenship. Hungary adopted an amendment to the immigration law introducing an investment citizenship option in December

2012, shortly after the implementation of further austerity measures had been demanded by the EU and the IMF and approved by the government. Under the new law, foreigners who bought at least 300,000 euros in special government residency bonds with a five-year maturity date were offered preferential immigration treatment and a fast track to Hungarian citizenship without additional requirements of residence or real estate purchases (Varga, 2012). Between 2013 and 2017, when it closed the programme, Hungary had thereby granted more than 10,000 so-called “golden visas” to investors. Nowadays, Latvia and Greece boast the lowest amounts required of investors in Europe for residency – a still sizeable 250,000 euros. Yet a real estate investment of up to 650,000 euros also buys foreigners residency rights, and in some cases full European citizenship, in Ireland, Spain, Portugal, Greece, Cyprus, Macedonia, Bulgaria, and Malta, whose investment programmes have all been implemented since 2012 in the context of tightening austerity measures (Harrison, 2013; Peter, 2013). Visa-free travel to core countries, citizenship of a Schengen zone state, or even the right to work in the EU thereby become available to the (moderately or very) wealthy. This time around, access to citizenship is restricted “only” by income, apparently breaking the historical logic of ascribing citizenship at birth. However, the commodification of citizenship does not follow an alternative, non-ascriptive logic – the investors already possess an ascribed citizenship, and the newly acquired one can be passed onto future generations by descent. It also does not represent a viable option for most of the world’s population. Instead, it is either an option purposely designed for a very select few or – more frequently – is scandalized, stigmatized and, ultimately, criminalized, when it threatens to become available to a wider number of people.

In most cases, the declared goal of economic citizenship programmes is to attract wealthy investors, especially from China, but also, and increasingly, from Russia and the Middle East. Both the Hungarian and the Greek governments actively promoted the launch of their investment citizenship programmes in China. Cyprus, interested in preserving financial relations with Russia, initially tried to cut down the amount required for investment citizenship in order to compensate for the losses of the Russian business community in the recent Cypriot bank crisis (Focus Online, 2013). In the meantime, resident Cypriot citizens faced restrictions on the use of debit and

credit cards, check cashing and daily withdrawals from their bank accounts, as well as a ban on premature termination and compulsory renewal of all-time saving deposits. Similar austerity measures were imposed on resident Greek citizens during the 2015 debt crisis and bailout negotiations. Although closed banks and cash-strapped ATMs made any form of payment difficult in Greece, money transfer and cash withdrawal restrictions did not apply to investor citizens and Western nationals.

For wealthy individuals of non-Western countries, investment citizenship clearly represents a means of global social mobility that eludes both ascription and migration, and at the same time trumps race. In this regard, it is a globalized instance of what, in the context of racial inequalities in Brazil, has been referred to as “whitening with money” (Hasenbalg, 2005) – a capital-facilitated symbolic move up the racial ladder. Such monetary – and momentary – disconnect from the racialized body through possession of a European Union passport is, however, no reason for celebrating a post-racial order. On the one hand, it belies the experience of the great majority of transnational labour migrants, for whom border-crossing awarding upward economic mobility simultaneously entails the opposite risk – being reclassified as non-white and thus experiencing downward racial mobility. On the other hand, such racial reclassification poses very different degrees of difficulty depending on the colonial and imperial history of the context where one’s racial identity is being negotiated, thus reinforcing the hierarchies underlying the constructed racial continuum. In the context of Eastern Europe, it involves a “race to the bottom” similar to the one concerning Eastern European migrant labour in Western Europe or semi-skilled or unskilled labor in the region that ends up reproducing inner-European hierarchies and power relations.

Thus, sharp criticism of economic citizenship programmes as “an abuse of European Union membership” (Daily Mail, 2012) in the case of Hungary or, in the case of Malta, as “cheapening citizenship” (Passino, 2013; Shachar, 2014) has been instrumental in reasserting EU core countries’ leverage on Southern and Eastern European semi-peripheries. The austerity measures and other sanctions imposed on Cyprus and Malta, which had already implemented their investment citizenship programmes, and Montenegro, which was planning to do so, are illustrative in this regard. Thus, in the

context of the debate on the EU bailout of Cyprus's banks, the head of the German Christian Social Union (CSU) in the EU Parliament asked for a reform of Cyprus' citizenship law that would ensure that "not everyone who has a lot of money receives a Cypriot passport" (Gammelín and Hulverscheidt, 2013). It was also the German CSU that announced that it might request the reinstatement of visas for the citizens of Montenegro if its government implemented a citizenship by investment programme in the country, implying that this decision might affect the previous "progress" Montenegro had made "in the area of border management and immigration control" (Vijesti, 2010, quoted in Dzankic, 2012). In the wake of such reactions, the Montenegrin government had put the implementation of its citizenship by investment programme on hold until 2018, when it opened a limited three-year programme capped at 2000 investors. In turn, Malta's citizenship scheme, with an initial investment threshold of 650,000 euros, has been heavily disputed on a number of counts, including the European Commission's concerns that it would naturalize persons born and residing abroad without "genuine links to the country" (The Independent, 2014). As a result, the Maltese government has amended the scheme to include a more severe residence requirement and further investment in real estate and government bonds, raising the contribution to a total of 1,150,000 euros. It thereby hoped to raise up to one billion euro yearly, around one-eighth of Malta's GNP, but ended up raising the – still notable – sum of 718 million euros since the programme started (Die Zeit, 2015; Transparency International, 2018).

The increase in the commodification of European citizenship in the context of tightening austerity regimes not only reflects, but also reinforces the ongoing widening of the worldwide inequality gap. The most recent Oxfam report, *Reward Work, Not Wealth*, alerted the world to the fact that the year 2017 had seen the biggest increase of billionaires in history – at the incredible pace of one more every two days (Oxfam, 2018). In one year, the very wealthy saw their fortunes grow by 762 billion US dollars. This amount itself – how much richer the very rich became in those twelve months – is seven times higher than the one needed to end extreme poverty worldwide. The current gap between the rich and the poor at the global level – maybe more appropriately termed an abyss – makes today's world more unequal than

it has been at any previous time in history (Reid-Henry, 2015). Against this background, the emergence of investor citizenship programmes and the increasing migration and refugee flows into Europe can both be understood as strategies of eluding the ascription of citizenship and the unequal transfer of property underlying it – yet the availability of such strategies across social strata is as unequal as the worldwide distribution of wealth. While regulations and sanctions from supra-state and financial institutions ensure that investor visas remain unaffordable for most or are not introduced at all in financially strained states, austerity measures turn more state assets into commodities benefitting Western banks, creditors, and core states: Greece had to auction off several of its islands, nature preserves, and even ancient ruins under the terms of the most recent bailout in 2015 – a possibility interpreted as a “selling of history” by advisers to the Greek Ministry of Labor, Social Security and Social Solidarity (Shuster, 2015). Also as part of the bailout deal, strategic state assets such as dozens of Greek airports were transferred to the property of a single private company whose major stakeholder is the German state (N-tv, 2015).

At the same time, the racial and ethnic policing of non-Western migrants and refugees underlines the immutability of the ascription of citizenship for the wider population, and ultimately the denial of equal opportunities for upward social mobility at the global level. According to the former French EU affairs minister Pierre Lalouche, one of the reasons France spoke out against Romanian efforts to join the EU’s passport-free Schengen zone in 2010 was a concern with “the distribution of Romanian passports” to Moldovans. The territory of Moldova was part of the Romanian Principality of Moldavia from the mid-14th through the mid-19th century and part of Greater Romania 1918–1940 and 1941–1945.\* Since many Moldovans are ethnically and linguistically Romanian and to almost 95 per cent Romanian Orthodox Christians, Bucharest adopted a law granting foreign nationals of Romanian descent the right to become citizens of the country as soon as Moldova gained its independence from the Soviet Union. Since then,

\* Formerly known as Bessarabia, the region was annexed by the Soviet Union during World War II and became an independent republic in 1991. According to Romanian officials, many Moldovans regard the Romanian passport as the key to the EU and try to acquire Romanian citizenship as fast as possible using both official and unofficial channels (Călugăreanu and Mogos, 2012).



Romania has processed an estimated 225,000 citizenship applications from Moldovans (Iordachi, 2012).

The widely read German magazine *Der Spiegel* illustrated the typical threat scenario mobilized in anti-immigration arguments with the words: “[T]he EU, which is already suffering from enlargement fatigue, is stealthily being expanded from the east – without a referendum or any agreements from Brussels, Berlin or Paris. The Moldovans are voting with their feet and marching into the EU’s economic paradise – through the back door” (Bidder, 2010).

As illicit intermediaries can even generate proof of Romanian ancestry where none exists, thereby spurring illegal trade of Romanian passports, EU fears of “creeping expansion from the East” have fed on exaggerated prognoses of the “stream of Moldovan migration” into Western Europe. Evidence has, however, shown that Romania’s naturalization programme has created proportionately fewer EU citizens than similar efforts in France and the UK (Călugăreanu and Mogos, 2012) and that Western European states grant far more new citizenships per 1,000 residents than states in any other part of Europe (Milmo, 2014). Nevertheless, France’s concern with Moldovan migrants was the first in a line of Western European states’ arguments against Romania and Bulgaria joining the Schengen zone. In 2013, the then German minister of the interior, Hans-Peter Friedrich, announced that “the attempt [to join] will fail because of a German veto” and he urged both countries to take further steps “to prevent migrants abusing the system” (The Economist, 2013). At the same time, leading EU officials have repeatedly expressed concern that the expansion of the Schengen zone to Romania and Bulgaria would trigger an influx of North African refugees from Greece, which currently has no land connection to the rest of the Schengen space (Brady, 2012). As a result, Romania and Bulgaria’s access to the Schengen zone is currently postponed indefinitely, and the two countries consequently rank lowest among all EU countries in Henley&Partners’ visa restriction index, which measures the amount of mobility granted by passports worldwide (Henley&Partners, 2017). In 2018, Moldova – not a EU member – introduced its own citizenship by investment programme, thus entering the race to the bottom by boasting that it is “ten times cheaper than Malta and also cheaper than St. Kitts and Grenada CBI passports” (Corpocrat, 2018).

Despite many of the arguments exchanged by critics and promoters alike, at stake in such debates is not the abstract worth of citizenship, nor the amount of cultural and social ties of members with the national community. Instead, financially strained semi-peripheral states are interested in how the commodification of citizenship facilitates the management of austerity. At the same time, wealthy core states are concerned about the consequences of the commodification of citizenship for migration and about the rights of potential migrants in core regions of the world-economy. From different directions, both are trying to capitalize on the very coloniality that makes the citizenship of certain states a highly valuable commodity.

It is therefore important to note that, while any state's citizenship could theoretically be commodified by becoming the object of investor programmes, it is only the citizenship of few states that lends itself to being commodified by virtue of being a scarce good awarding (relatively) rare benefits. From this point of view, states whose citizenship includes the advantage of the above-mentioned visa-free travel to core countries or even the right to legal employment in them, offer what could be referred to as "premium citizenship" that is attractive to investors. States that are not part of the core, may, as in the case of Saint Kitts and Nevis, use the residual benefits of having been a British colony and a current member of the Commonwealth of Nations and its visa-free travel area. This, however, hardly compares to the rights accruing from EU citizenship, which include free movement, residence and less discrimination within the EU, the right to vote for and stand as a candidate in European Parliament and municipal elections, diplomatic protection outside the EU, etc. Citizenship for sale is not only unavailable to the majority of the world's population, but would not prove a viable economic strategy in any but "premium citizenship" states, among which EU member states rank highest. The EU is home to eight out of the ten countries worldwide whose citizens enjoy the most freedom of visa-free travel (Johansen, 2013). At the same time, the EU is the historic heir to Western colonial states whose possessions covered almost half of the inhabited surface of the non-European world as late as the 1930s and which today control 28 out of the remaining 58 colonial possessions (Böröcz and Sarkar, 2005; Dependencies and Territories of the World, 2013). The Henley&Partners Passport Index, produced in cooperation with the trade

association for the world's airlines, IATA, ranks Western countries among the top 10 in terms of visa-free travel. Most passport holders in Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia rank far lower. This explains why EU residence permits are extremely attractive to Chinese investors, and much more so than for Hong Kong investors, who hold a "Special Administrative Region of China" passport – another reminder of residual colonial advantage. Tellingly, territories "dependent" on the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, the USA, the Netherlands, and France are not considered separate nationalities, but "destinations" (Henley&Partners, 2017) and thus do not get their own scores. The colonial entail of property thereby helps perpetuate the colonial entail of premium citizenship for Western states.

Citizenship is thus not only a core mechanism for the maintenance of global inequalities in a world capitalist system, but also one on the basis of which their reproduction in the postcolonial present, i.e., their colonality, is being enacted. It is in the context of global capitalism and its corresponding logic of colonial accumulation that the institution of citizenship emerged; the economic and political interests of the Western European colonial powers that pioneered it were essential in defining its central features, and are decisive in maintaining premium citizenships restricted today. The commodification of citizenship to the benefit of non-Western wealthy investors on the one hand, and its policing and restriction for labor migrants on the other, currently signal an economic and epistemic renegotiation of citizenship, respectively. Southeastern Europe's role in these negotiations, as often in its history, is one of a geopolitical and epistemic buffer zone that often withstands pressure from the Western core by passing it on to non-European others and thus reproducing Occidentalist premises. Revealing the colonality inherent in the institution of citizenship as a type of inherited property is a reminder that pathways to decoloniality emerge through a rejection of Occidentalism, racism, and constructed national identities.

***Bibliography*** ➤



ТОЗ КОЙТО ПАДНЕ  
В БОЙ ЗА СВОБОДА  
ТОЙ НЕ УМИРА





# Post-Stalinism's uncanny symbioses:

**Ethno-nationalism and the global orientations  
of Bulgarian socialism during the 1960s and 1970s**

**Zhivka Valiavicharska**



*Image Description:*

Fig.1. Bratska Mogila as of July 2018, with the  
scene Robstvo in the centre.

Photo by the Author.

**O**n September 17, 1972 Angela Davis landed at the airport in Sofia to a show of welcome and support. Only a few months prior to her arrival, Bulgarian society followed the fate of the American political activist in great suspense: her capture and her prolonged and arduous public trial were covered extensively in the Bulgarian press, and *Narodna Mladezh*, a popular socialist youth newspaper, organized a massive letter-writing campaign in support of her liberation.\* In the following decades, in her political and public work, Davis has never missed to make the point that she owes her freedom and her life to the people – it was only thanks to the relentless mobilizations against her capture and against the political persecutions of Black radicals and communist activists fighting for racial and social justice that she was released from the repressive grind of the justice system and escaped prison and possibly death. In her autobiography, she wrote that the international campaign in support of her freedom, along with the freedom of all political prisoners in the United States, “had not only exerted serious pressure on the government, it had also stimulated the further growth of the mass movement at home” (Davis, 1974: 398). At the center of this international movement, she continued, was “the socialist community of nations”. “In those countries rallies were attended by more people than I had ever before seen assembled in one place – hundreds of thousands, for example in the GDR, and close to three quarters of a million in Cuba” (Davis, 1974: 398-99).

During the late 1960s and the 1970s, Bulgarian society was drawn into a swirl of international events as the socialist public sphere was activated by the global echoes and alignments of struggles for social, economic, and racial justice across borders and continents. These struggles opened possibilities for forging political alternatives across geopolitical and regional confines, to which the socialist countries had distinct contributions to offer. The Bulgarian press covered the international news in collaboration with reporters from the Soviet Union and other socialist countries strategically located in cities such as New York, London, Havana, and Cairo. In

\* Parts of this research have been published in an earlier version, in Nikolay Karkov and Zhivka Valiavicharska, “Rethinking East-European Socialism: Notes Toward a Decolonial, Anti-Capitalist Methodology,” *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 20, 5 (2018): 785-813. I thank Polina Manolova, Philipp Lottholz, Neda Genova and Jana Tsoneva for their feedback and crucial suggestions in developing some moments in this paper. I also thank Momchil Hristov for introducing me to the work of Matthieu Renault.



# ДОБРЕ ДОШЛА, АНДЖЕЛА!

«Особено щастлива съм, че мога да посетя родината на Георги Димитров» • Среща на Анджела Дейвис с младата творческа интелигенция

Само няколко месеца ни делят от дните, когато българската младеж целият наш народ заедно с прогресивните хора от петте континента издигаше глас в защита на справедливата кауза на смелата борбата за свобода и граждански права, младата комунистка Анджела Дейвис

защита на мира, ректора на Софийския университет акад. Христо Христоу, представител на столичната обществено-много младежи и професори

„Върховна радост е за нас — изтъкна при пристигането си Анджела Дейвис, — че можам да дойда в България



Fig.2. Welcome, Angela!, Source: *Narodna Mladezh*, 18 September, 1972.

Photo by the Author.

the early 1970s, *Narodna Mladezh* followed a dizzying range of political developments from around the world, from the war in Vietnam and the anti-war protests in the United States, to teacher strikes in Philadelphia, to Israel's attack on Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, to the last throes of Portuguese colonial rule in Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Papua New Guinea, and Angola. The newspaper ran regular stories on the economic and social transformation of Chilean society under the short-lived socialist government of Salvador Allende, the right-wing backlash and military coup that took over the Chilean state, and the violence, repression, death, and exile of masses of people that devastated Chilean society in the following years – some of which ended up finding refuge in socialist Bulgaria, mostly in Sofia, forming a small but strong diasporic community which energized the radical cultures of the city.



Fig 3. Ivan Stoychev, political cartoon as a commentary on the capture of Angela Davis; Source: *Komsomolska Iskra*, 11 January 1971. Photo by the author.





Fig 4. Letter from a Chilean Woman;

Source: *Otechestven Glas*, Plovdiv, 8 March 1974. Photo by the author.

In the weeks, months and years following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in April 1968, Bulgarian society had become closely acquainted with the social conditions of Black people in the United States, the realities of racism and legal segregation, the history of the civil rights and Black radical movements, the brutality and racism of the police, the structural role of prisons in class and racial inequalities, and more. *Narodna Mladezh* began the rubric *Black and White*, which ran through most of 1972 – it explored intersections between racism, capitalist exploitation, the criminal system and criminalized populations, and the political persecutions of communists and Black radicals. It published coverage of the Attica prison rebellions in New York State, the war in Vietnam and the anti-war protests, and the persecution of a number of radical political organizers, including members of the Black Panthers – Bobby Seale, Erica Haggins, and Huey Newton; the Soledad Brothers; the “Chicago Seven”; the “Seattle Six”; and others.

It was then not surprising that, after she was acquitted, Davis visited a number of socialist countries to honor the people who supported her, including the USSR, Czechoslovakia, the People’s Republic of Bulgaria, the GDR, Cuba, and Chile. During and after her trip she shared some of her impressions from the socialist countries, including the housing developments in the Soviet Union, the reconstruction of Tashkent after the earthquake in April 1966 that devastated much of the city’s built environment, the women’s





Fig. 5. The Storm of Black Protest; Source: Narodna Mladezh, April 11, 1968, covering the unrest on the streets in the U.S. after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Photo by the Author.



organizations, and “the happy way children live” (*Narodna Mladezh*, 1972). She told reporters in Moscow that “when we return to the United States, we will speak of the true equality of all peoples in the USSR, the rapid progress of all nations and nationalities living on the territory of [this] country. We will speak about the Soviet people’s remarkable accomplishments in the spheres of economy and culture” (*Narodna Mladezh*, 1972).

Davis spent a total of four days in Bulgaria. She was accompanied by Kendra Alexander, her sister and a veteran of the civil rights and anti-war movements in the United States and who, together with Franklin Alexander (also with them), co-founded and co-chaired the committee of the international *Free Angela and All Political Prisoners* campaign. The guests met with the country’s political leadership and with representatives of youth and women’s organizations – among them was Elena Lagadinova, a high-ranking politician and chair of the Committee of the Bulgarian Women’s Movement for many years. Her relentless work and organizing throughout the 1970s helped build extensive infrastructures of care, leisure, and social reproduction that changed the social and material lives of many women and opened the material and social conditions for reorganizing gender and social relations in unprecedented ways (Ghodsee, 2012; 2014; 2015).

The coverage of the events of September 1972 suggests that the guests were treated like official visitors of highest honor and their experience was mediated by official programs and their contact with the political elites. It is unclear to what extent they were able to escape the elaborate state rituals and curated encounters with the “people” to experience everyday life on their own. However, Davis left a lasting memory in the collective experience of an entire generation of young people and was an inspiration for young Bulgarian women in particular, who still remember being captivated by her strength and dignity, her public presence, and her political spirit.

The guests were taken to Varna, a major city on the Black Sea coast, where they visited factories and toured the Black Sea resort *Zlatni Piasatsi*. They also visited the town of Septemvri near Plovdiv, where agricultural workers showed them their land cooperatives, their orchards and vineyards. Davis received a painting of women rose-gatherers working in the rose valleys, as the socialist state had developed the rose oil industry and exported its products on the international markets as part of the symbolic repertoire of

Bulgarian nationalism. The party leadership gave her the prestigious award for political activism “Georgi Dimitrov”. Local newspapers compared Davis’ indictment and trial to the experience of Dimitrov, Bulgarian-born communist and Comintern leader, who was framed together with other communist and anti-fascist activists in the infamous Leipzig trial – a spectacular public show of terror and repression during the first months of the Nazi government. As for Davis, she took the recognition as an honor and used it as an opportunity to stress the importance of international solidarity among people in struggle. From Dimitrov, she said, we’ve learned a lot – “not only how to win in court, but like him, we realized that this is not enough. [...] The only way to win until the end is to unify the progressive forces of our people, and of the entire world” (*Narodna Mladezh*, 20 September 1972). And further, she stressed, the road towards the elimination of colonialism and racial oppression was the full abolition of capitalism and “the building of a socialist culture” and a “socialist way of life.” “What we learned”, she shared, was that “only socialist society will give people the opportunity to enjoy the fruits of their labor, and that building socialism is the only road towards building a new human and a new society” (*Narodna Mladezh*, 18 September 1972).

A number of African and African-American intellectuals shared this idea – that racism and colonialism cannot be uprooted unless capitalism is abolished – and that there is a structural juncture between the anti-capitalist and anti-colonial struggles, a juncture that was rather obvious to many at the time, both in the formerly colonized world as well as in the East. These bridges became a way of uprooting the colonial legacy in the newly independent countries and tools for resisting the various structures that reproduced colonial power. They opened new terrains of alliances and tensions and forged transcontinental forms of resistance against capitalist development in the North and the West, imperialism, and the reproduction of colonial power in the postcolonial contexts. All these were efforts in reordering the geographies of power and the circulation of knowledge away from the Euro-American capitalist world.

At the same time, many tensions structure and fracture these political landscapes, leaving a conflicting legacy both in the formerly colonized countries and in the socialist “East”. The historical experiences of socialism during the post-Stalinist period remains strained by the tensions of these



Fig. 6. *The Heath of the South: International Day of Struggle against Colonialism;*  
Source: *Narodna Mladezh*, 21 February 1972. Photo by the Author.

contradictions in many ways. This essay offers an observation on these discrepant moments as they unfolded in the context of post-Stalinist socialist Bulgaria. As I have been studying the discourses and politics of Bulgarian ethno-nationalism from the post-Stalinist period, I have noticed its perplexing symbioses with anti-colonial and anti-racist politics, and with national liberation movements in the Global South in particular. Paradoxically, the country's global reorientation and realignment with the Third nations from the period converged with the politics of repression, erasure, and assimilation of its own minorities. This is embedded in the specific political logics of Bulgarian nationalism from the post-Stalinist period. With its subaltern and revolutionary elements, its global-humanist orientations, and its commitment to socialist modernization and social progress, the nationalist imaginaries of the post-Stalinist period constructed historical analogies and political links with the anticolonial national liberation movements and their nation-state projects in the post-independence contexts. These were often discursive metaphorical formations that stretched incompatible historical realities. They made Bulgarian post-Stalinist nationalism a manifold environment where

subaltern and decolonial elements cohabitated with its quasi-colonial and Eurocentric logics, an environment that opened grounds for different and conflicting political agendas.

## **Socialist and global: Cold War frameworks and alternative methodologies**

The anti-colonial and anti-racist politics of the socialist countries during the 1960s and 1970s have usually been examined through research methodologies informed by Cold War political agendas and frameworks, and are often discounted as state ideology and blanket anti-American or anti-Western propaganda. Generations of scholarship have seen the relations between the socialist countries and the postcolonial world through a Cold War political framework, emphasizing economic interest and gain, spheres of influence, geopolitical competition, and imperialist expansion. Much of it rendered the socialist world, and the Soviet Union in particular, as another form of imperial power that accumulates, although according to a different political logic, economic resources and political influence (Chari and Verdery, 2009; for further discussion see Karkov and Valiavicharska, 2018). Postcolonial and decolonial critiques have similarly neglected the counterhegemonic axes of solidarity at the crossroads between the socialist and postcolonial worlds. Focused exclusively on First-World/Third-World, South-North, and even South-South axes of mobility, they have accepted some of the anti-communist premises of Cold War scholarship on socialism and have left many unexplored questions around the role of the socialist countries in the anti-colonial liberation movements and in forging distinct economic, social, and cultural worlds alternative to global capitalist development and resistant to Western hegemonies.

A recent body of work in Russian and East European studies positioned at the intersection of socialist and postcolonial studies has returned to these histories to forcefully challenge existing narratives, opening yet wider horizons for decolonizing the historiographies of radical political movements during the 1960s and 1970s. Studying the relations between the Second and Third Worlds from the late 1950s to the end of the 1980s, this new generation of

research theorizes the political dynamics between the socialist world and the formerly colonized countries against dominant tropes such as Cold War, First World/Third World, or center-periphery binaries, opening yet wider horizons for historical revision away from Eurocentric historiographies of the global context of the period.

Displacing East-West and South-North axes of analysis, researchers are recovering alternative routes and locations where decolonial politics with anti-capitalist visions emerged and thrived. Probing into what she calls the blind spots in Black Atlantic and postcolonial studies, Monica Popescu expands on Paul Gilroy's famous study of the transatlantic contours of the African diasporic experience and the way it reshaped concepts and cultures of modernity (Popescu, 2014). "Black solidarities and cultural alliances were not woven only between the African continent, the Americas, and Western Europe," Popescu observes, arguing for a "more capacious understanding of the black Atlantic during the 1970s and 80s" (Popescu, 2014: 92-93). She joins the collective effort of a growing body of scholarship that traces the lost or forgotten journeys of African, Caribbean, and African-American intellectuals, political and cultural activists, students, and workers to the Soviet Union and other socialist countries in Eastern Europe and elsewhere, restoring the visibility of these marginalized diasporic cross-continental mobilities and their unanticipated openings and challenges (Matusevich, 2008, 2009a, 2009b; Quist-Adade, 2005; Popescu, 2010, 2014; Engerman, 2011; Djagalov and Salazkina, 2016; Baldwin, 2002).

Further, David Engerman has argued that the relations between the formerly colonized countries and the socialist world, although deeply entangled in Cold War politics, cannot easily be explained through the main tropes of Cold War political rationality – economic interest and gain, spheres of political and economic influence, imperial expansion, and geopolitical competition (2011). These relations were not unidirectional but multifaceted, marked by a "multipolarity" of interactions and dynamics (Engerman, 2011: 197). In line with these inquiries, Djagalov and Salazkina follow the lost footprints of the cultural and intellectual convergences of writers, filmmakers, and activists from the Global South in the Soviet Union between the 1950 and the 1980s, which, they argue, opened terrains for the emergence of a shared discourse of Third World film, literature, and culture. They see these convergences as



situated at the intersection of multiple hegemonies, as destabilizing fixed dynamics and opening new possibilities (Djagalov and Salazkina, 2016: 181-82).

Dominant frameworks have also seen the newly independent countries, from Africa in particular, as passive recipients of aid, expertise, education, and various forms of support delivered by the socialist countries in patronizing ways, folding the formerly colonized countries into the developmentalist frameworks of the socialist governments. But scholars have challenged these accounts as well, changing the historical genealogies of dissent in the socialist countries (Matusevich, 2008, 2009a; Popescu, 2014; Mark and Slobodian, 2018). They show that, on the contrary, students and workers of color who came to the socialist countries during and after independence became harbingers of modernity and a door to the world for the socialist youth in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe (Matusevich, 2008). African students in particular taught the socialist youth much about racism, anti-racism, and resistance, generating cultures of non-conformity and inspiring protest and various forms of social discontent during the 1960s and 1970s. In other words, these alternative mobilities brought political energy and inspired social radicalism in the socialist East, energizing the socialist youth in unpredictable ways, fueling social engagement and political activity (Mark and Slobodian, 2018). Through frameworks of socialist solidarity, social justice, and duty to the people in struggle around the world against racism and colonial rule, against imperialist expansionism, war and militarism, and global inequality – the international vocabulary of the 1960s and 1970s – the socialist countries forged new global alliances, solidarities, and political imaginaries that transcended Cold War and other geopolitical divides (Apostolova, 2017). In the socialist countries, these imaginaries shaped a new kind of worldliness and a sense of global interconnectedness that was both alternative and resistant to capitalist and Western hegemonies. Even as they now have been left behind, in the words of David Scott, as the old utopias of “past futures” driven into dead-ends by the tragic unfolding of their limits, of their national and revolutionary teleologies, their ruptural and transformative energies hold the possibility to “reanimate this present and even engender in it new and unexpected horizons” (Scott, 2004: 1).

Many tensions structure and fracture this legacy, leaving an incoherent and contradictory history both in the formerly colonized countries and in

the socialist “East.” For example, scholars have pointed out the unwelcome and counteractive effects of the socialist countries’ involvement in the newly independent postcolonial nations, their race-blind approaches and the failures of the socialist governments to challenge racism in their own societies as they opened to the rest of the world (Mark and Slobodian, 2018; Law, 2012; Matusevich, 2009a; 2009b; Charles Quist-Adade, 2005; Baldwin, 2002). In addition, recent debates have explored some of the tensions present in socialist visions of modernity and their global ambitions and travels. On the one hand, these modernities were organized around distinctly socialist concepts of equality, community, leisure, public access, and social mobility, and woven around legacies of anti-capitalist, anti-fascist, anti-colonial, and national liberation movements. At the same time, they were committed to social progress, modernization, and industrial and infrastructural development with their own teleologies and universals, often converging with Eurocentric and colonial social and political orders. At times they aligned with Western modernity projects while at others departed starkly from them, forging social and material contexts that were discontinuous and incompatible, while simultaneously retaining uneasy and ghastly continuities (Karkov and Valiavicharska, 2018). These moments can be seen as the manifold faces of what Michael David-Fox has defined as “multiple” modernities and their transcontinental “entanglements,” which the socialist worlds have been enmeshed in and have set in motion (David-Fox, 2016).\*

## **Anti-colonial national liberation and Bulgarian ethno-nationalism**

The international context of the 1960s and 1970s changed socialist Bulgaria’s orientation in the global sphere. Unlike the Soviet Union or neighboring Yugoslavia, the People’s Republic of Bulgaria was a small socialist country, which didn’t have the political and economic resources to exert much influence on the international arena on its own. Similar to other socialist countries in Eastern Europe, the 1960s and 1970s in Bulgaria were decades

\* In *Crossing Borders* David-Fox, offers an informative synthesis of the debates on modernity in the last thirty years of scholarship in the field of Soviet and socialist history.

marked by a strong revival of nationalist politics. Bulgarian ethno-nationalism from the period propelled ethnic and religious assimilation campaigns that reached unfathomable proportions in the 1980s. In the span of three decades, the state launched a mass-scale systematic campaign to rename minorities who bore Turko-Arabic names, and to suppress their religion, languages, and histories. A coercive state-orchestrated effort, the ethno-national assimilation campaigns were developed in the context of a socialist modernization project built on humanist foundations, and from within a kind of “progressive” Marxist-humanist socialist discourse.\*

The ethnic assimilations become even more perplexing in the context of the strong anti-colonial and anti-racist rhetoric in the socialist public sphere from the time, pointing to inconsistencies that raise well-founded questions. Paradoxically, Bulgarian socialist politics in support of the anti-colonial liberation struggles, the political solidarities and alignments with the formerly colonized countries drawn in the public sphere, became entangled in the ethno-nationalist politics of the period, converging with the assimilation of ethnic and religious minorities within the country.

How do we explain this paradoxical convergence? Many have been quick to attribute these contradictions to the discrepancies between “official ideology” and everyday life or the realities of “actually existing socialism”, lamenting the hypocrisies of the socialist governments. But these seeming paradoxes were already present in the political discourses and their public spheres, in their polemical and discursive range. Some of them can be found in the specific political logics of Bulgarian nationalism from the post-Stalinist period.

Nationalism from the 1970s was not the same as the nationalisms from the pre-socialist period. National history, in order to be a socialist history, had to be rewritten as a people’s history and a revolutionary history, one grounded in the stories of oppression and collective struggle. It had to be very different from the nationalisms of the pre-socialist, interwar period. These “old” nationalisms, which post-Stalinist Marxists called “bourgeois chauvinism”, often aligned with the fascist and irredentist agendas of the monarchic and pro-authoritarian governments between the two world wars.

\* This is further developed in my forthcoming work on the humanist turn and its relationship to ethno-nationalism in socialist Bulgaria. For a preliminary elaboration in a comparative study of Bulgarian and Yugoslavian ethno-nationalism, see Karkov and Valiavicharska, 2018.

Calling itself “socialist patriotism”, post-Stalinist nationalism changed the national narrative to purge it of its “bourgeois” content and its historical links to interwar nationalist and fascist movements. It constructed a continuity of endurance, suffering, and struggle of the ordinary people and the oppressed that culminated in the socialist present – a present that had no precedent in history because it brought liberation, democracy, and material and cultural wealth to the ordinary people (Zhivkova 1982: 519).

Further, the rise of post-Stalinist nationalism emerged as a kind of cultural emancipation from Soviet hegemony. In some sense, nationalist discourse from the period was embedded in a politics of resistance both against Stalinism and against Soviet cultural and political influence. It gave post-Stalinist humanists the opportunity to displace Soviet-centric histories of the socialist revolution as a world-historical phenomenon and to trace an internal genealogy of revolutionary traditions in the struggles of its own people. It staged a competing revolutionary narrative that bypassed the February and October Revolutions – after all, the Bulgarian people had their own revolutionary traditions. In this sense some aspects of post-Stalinist Bulgarian nationalism contained a subaltern element that exhibits some of the complexities and contradictions of anti- and postcolonial nationalisms from the period. This is particularly legible in the work of Lyudmila Zhivkova, a leading figure who shaped the cultural politics of the country in the 1970s. Her writings contain a certain kind of awareness of the Bulgarian people as a “minor nation” and a “minor people”, and Zhivkova’s work in the sphere of culture was crucial in reimagining and reconfiguring the small socialist country in alliance with the countries from the Global South, and in exploring links with non-Western cultural histories and traditions, especially from Southeast Asia.

But Zhivkova’s work also contains a problematic universalism and a commitment to national and patriotic ideals that bear an uneasy relationship to the ethno-nationalist politics of the period. The post-Stalinist nationalist imaginary and its modernizing logics constructed the Ottoman past as backward and frozen in time, as the historical agent of patriarchal relations, “cultural traditionalism”, and “religious fanaticism.” Seen through this lens, Muslims and ethnic minorities and their cultures became a remnant of the past, a kind of social and cultural anachronism which socialist modernization was to overcome (Neuburger, 2004). In this

sense, discourses of socialist modernization, progress, and development became a central element in the emerging doctrine of ethno-nationalism.

In this already complex discursive formation, Bulgarian national independence (from the Ottoman empire) became the framework that aligned post-Stalinist notions of Bulgarian peoplehood with the anti-colonial liberation movements and with the oppressed and subjugated people globally. Considering the hegemonic role of the national idea in anti-colonial revolutionary thought, it is not surprising that Lenin's writings on the national question circulated among anti-colonial revolutionaries in Africa during the 1950s and 1960s. Matthieu Renault's work brings out the decolonial and anti-imperialist elements in Lenin's work on national self-determination. Attuned to the different political content and contextual meanings of nationalism, the difference between "oppressor" and "oppressed" nations, Lenin recognized the rebellious anti-imperialist potentials of national self-determination movements in the peripheries of the Russian empire – to him, they were articulated both against the extractivist and exploitative logic of Russian imperialism and against the ethnic and racial supremacy of Russian imperial nationalism. As Renault has put it, by recognizing and foregrounding these peripheral forces, Lenin "decentered the revolution". They were heterogeneous revolutionary formations which moved according to their own temporalities and disrupted Eurocentric linearity and stagism (Renault, 2018).

But although Lenin's "right of nations" principle contained anti-imperialist content, it was a product of a different historical context and was quite inarticulate when it comes to European colonial racism. Therefore, anti-colonial intellectuals and revolutionaries used Lenin alongside the work of figures such as Frantz Fanon, C.L.R. James, and Amilcar Cabral to articulate the intersections of racism, colonialism, capitalist accumulation, and class power. Similarly, in the context of the socialist 1960s and 1970s, the framework of national self-determination and national autonomy did not provide appropriate language against the everyday racisms towards students and workers of colour who came from the African continent, Vietnam, and other parts of the Global South.

Further, postcolonial critics of the nation have spoken out about the pitfalls and paradoxes of national consciousness as it organized the anti-colonial imaginaries during the period of decolonization, of the dead-

ends and disastrous political consequences of the nation-state both as an anti-colonial vision of political sovereignty and as a political and social organization of postcolonial societies. These analyses have relevance for the Bulgarian post-Stalinist context. This is not to brush over, in an ahistorical fashion, the specificities of these two historical realities and their distinct political logics, as Maria Todorova has carefully warned us (Todorova, 2010). They are important precisely because some part of Bulgarian nationalism from the 1970s somewhat incongruently recognized itself in the national independence projects in the postcolonial world. The work of Partha Chatterjee and Arif Dirlik, among others, reminds us that the national form in the postcolonial contexts, even as it mobilized much of the anti-colonial imaginary, was a European colonial paradigm both *empirically*, as it imposed uniform political administrations and homogeneous national cultures, and *ideologically*, as nations replicated the cultural and political imaginaries of the colonizers which were utterly unfitted for the social and cultural realities of the former colonies (Dirlik, 2002; Chatterjee, 1984). Postcolonial nations too experienced the violence of homogenization and erasure, of ethnic and religious partitioning while constructing their national cultures and histories, all in the name of independence, modernization, social justice, and democracy. As Dirlik observes:

*The tragedy of anticolonial revolutionary nationalism has been that it was condemned almost from the beginning to replicate the practices of the colonialists in their very efforts at nation building.. The colonialism of nation building is most starkly obvious, as the very idea of the nation, and the way it was imagined, was already stamped with the legacy of the very colonialism it sought to overthrow (Dirlik, 2011: 437).*

Chatterjee has cautioned against seeing anti- and postcolonial nationalisms as simple derivatives of European models – such a move takes away, once again, the political agency and imagination from the colonized. He reads Indian nationalism as the hegemonic project of the middle classes among the local populations which occupied an ambivalent position – “of subordination in one relation and... of dominance in another”. “The construction of hegemonic ideologies”, Chatterjee continues, “typically involves the cultural

efforts of classes placed precisely in such situations” (Chatterjee, 1993: 36).

But as Dirlik has also pointed out, the political alternatives to capitalism in the postcolonial worlds, ideas of economic and social justice, democracy, material and social equality, and social mobility, for the most part also succumbed to the political form of national self-determination and national sovereignty (Dirlik, 2011: 438). Left-reformist and “revisionist” ideas and movements in socialist countries such as Bulgaria similarly embraced nationalism, particularly during the years of post-Stalinism, resonating with subaltern nationalist trends in the postcolonial world. It is interesting to consider that to some activists, in particular to those situated in the United States at the time, the anti-Stalinist movements in Eastern Europe and the anti-colonial revolutions in the South were part of the same world-historical upheaval threaded by a certain kind of humanism (Valiavicharska, 2017; Scott, 2004: 29). In Bulgaria, the merger of socialist humanism, socialist modernization, and the national idea with its quasi-subaltern elements had another side: it propelled ethnic assimilations, mass renamings, departures, expulsions, and caused large-scale displacement to ethnic and religious minorities. It has led to state-driven erasures of minority histories, lineages and languages – all in the name of socialist modernization, equality, humanism, and social progress. It could be that post-Stalinist nationalism was consolidated as the hegemonic narrative of the country’s political, cultural, and intellectual elites, while the internal tensions of its content were a reflection of their ambivalent, twofold position in the social and geopolitical hierarchies within the country and in the global sphere.

These historical and contemporary revolutionary imaginaries converged in post-Stalinist socialist Bulgaria on the basis of a shared nationalism. They allowed for the construction of symbolic, political, and historical continuities between national independence movements in the Balkans from the 19th century and the anti-colonial national liberation struggles in Africa from the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup>. Bulgarian political discourse during the period, anchored in a narrative of centuries-long oppression under Ottoman rule and a history of national liberation struggles from the mid- to late 19<sup>th</sup> century, constructed a shared historical experience with the people in struggle from the Third World, and opened possibilities for political self-identifications with the colonized people and their own



“*natsionalno-osvoboditelni borbi*” (national liberation movements). In this context, the political uses of anti-racist and anti-colonial discourses in Bulgaria were recycled within an ethno-nationalist framework to form a symbiosis specific to the ethno-national narrative of post-Stalinist socialism. This is evident in the way terms such as *robstvo* or *igo* (slavery/yoke) forcefully reappeared in constructions of the Ottoman period in literature, public discourse, and even in scholarship during the post-Stalinist period. Those familiar with the historical and cultural reincarnations of nationalist tropes in Bulgaria know that, while part of the lexicon of the 1970s, they draw on historical and literary narratives from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries that had a central role in shaping Bulgarian national consciousness. It is no coincidence that this language was picked up and amplified in the 1960s and 1970s, as stories, news, and voices of the anti-colonial liberation struggles echoed in the Bulgarian public sphere.

These symbolic, political, and historical connections couldn't be made more direct in a speech party leader Todor Zhivkov gave in 1969, when a delegation of Bulgarian politicians visited India to discuss economic and cultural collaboration between the two countries.

*Please allow me to assure you that the Bulgarian people feel the same kind of sympathies and respect for the great multi-million Indian people. Centuries of struggles against foreign domination developed in our people not only a deep empathy towards the people in struggle for their freedom and independence, but a clearly expressed, actual solidarity with them. The Bulgarian people followed the oscillations of your struggle. It is familiar with and honors the activists in your national independence movement. This year Bulgaria will celebrate the centennial anniversary of the birth of Mahatma Gandhi, the great leader of India in its struggle against colonial yoke. Our people remember also the great statesperson and political leader, one of the followers and tireless activists against the colonial system, fighter for national independence and social progress, for peace and solidarity among the peoples – Djawaharlal Nehru. [...] The emergence of independent India was one of the greatest events in our times.. The once mighty global colonial system is now falling apart. The day is coming when the fires of national liberation struggles will burn the last flags of shameful colonialism. But both we, and you, and everyone who has waged a costly struggle for their national*





# Народна МЛАДЕЖ

Год. XXV. бр. 20 (6391)



София, петък, 24 януари, 1969 год.

Цена 2 стотинки

Орган на Централния  
комитет на ДКМС

## ПОСЕЩЕНИЕТО НА ДР. ТОДОР ЖИВКОВ В ИНДИЯ ВАЖЕН ЕТАП В УКРЕПВАЩАТА ДРУЖБА МЕЖДУ ДВЕТЕ СТРАНИ ПРИЯТЕЛСКИ СРЕЩИ И РАЗГОВОРИ • ОФИЦИАЛНА ВЕЧЕРЯ В ЧЕСТ НА ДРУГАРЯ ТОДОР ЖИВКОВ • БЪЛГАРСКИТЕ ГОСТИ ПРОДЪЛ- ЖАВАТ ДА СЕ ЗАПОЗНАВАТ С ДЕЛХИ

ДЕЛХИ, 23 януари (спец. кор. на БТА Йордан Божилов). Вчера след обед председателят на Министерския съвет Тодор Живков, придружен от министъра на външните работи Иван Башев и българския посланик в Делхи Христо Димитров, положи веници пред мавзолеите на Махатма Ганди, Джавахарлал Неру и Лал Бахадур Шастри. В парка пред мавзолея на Махатма Ганди той посади едно магнолиево дръвче в памет на великия индийски демократ. Тази церемония се предлага само на най-високи чуждестранни гости — държавни глави и правителствени ръководители.

По-късно Тодор Живков направи официални посещения на министър-председателя Индира Ганди и на вицепрезидента Венката Гире.

В приятелския разговор с Индира Ганди и Венката Гире бяха засегнати въпроси от взаимен интерес. Индийският вицепрезидент прие с благодарност поканичката на Тодор Живков да посети България в удобно за него време.

Председателят на Министерския съвет Тодор Живков прие по-късно министъра на търговията на Индия Динеш Сингх. Разговорът между двамата протече в приятелска атмосфера. Изтъкнато бе, че има голе



По време на посрещането на др. Тодор Живков и придружаващите го лица на летище Палам, Снимка: Владимир ИВАНОВ (Телефото—БТА)

ми възможности за разширяване и задълбочаване на сътрудничеството между двете страни в областта на икономиката и търговията.

Снощи министър-председателят на Индия Индира Ганди

даде в резиденцията на президента официална вечеря в чест на председателя на Министерския съвет Тодор Живков и придружаващите го лица. На вечерята присъстваха членове на индийския кабинет, де-

путати от парламента, кметът на Делхи, културни, обществени и политически дейци. От българска страна освен Тодор Живков тук бяха: министърът на външните работи Иван Башев и индийския кабинет, де-

(Продължава на 4-а стр.)

## Реч на ТОДОР ЖИВКОВ Реч на ИНДИРА ГАНДИ

Ваше превъзходителство,  
Пами и гостове

и днес. Още повече, че Вашето  
посещение в България, уважае

Ваше превъзходителство  
председателю Живков

отношенията между нашите  
две страни. Наред с това

Todor Zhivkov and Bulgarian delegation on an official visit to India;  
Source: Narodna Mladezh, January 24, 1969. Photo by the author.





Fig. 8. Lyubomir Dalchev, Ana Dalcheva, and Petar Atanasov, the scene *Robstvo* [Yoke/Slavery], in its original state, from the architectural-sculptural ensemble *Bratska Mogila*, Plovdiv, 1974; Source: Veneta Ivanova, *Bulgarska Monumentalna Skulptura: Razvitie i Problemi* (Sofia: Bulgarski Hudozhnik, 1978); Photo by Mihail Enev.

*and social liberation, we know: that in this world we will not get anything for free, that everything has to be fought for and defended (Narodna Mladezh 1969: 1, 4).*

These political analogies have found multiple expressions in the visual and monumental arts from the period – just one striking example is the sculptural composition *Robstvo* [Yoke/Slavery] from the *Bratska Mogila* in Plovdiv, depicting the suffering of the Bulgarian people under Ottoman rule (Fig. 8). The scene is part of a remarkable architectural ensemble from 1974, which narrates, in a sequence of nineteen monumental sculptural compositions, the revolutionary history of the Bulgarian people as constructed from the perspective of the 1970s: a nationalist history reimagined and rewritten

through the socialist present. The sculptural compositions, nested in the base of a lotus-like concrete structure, organize a circular motion and an experience that is at once a ritual movement, an act of commemoration, an inauguration into a historical narrative, and an orchestrated affective journey. The monument is now abandoned, and although it is currently in the “custody” of Plovdiv’s History Museum and receives minimal protection and maintenance, much of it had been destroyed or plundered earlier. Yet all the damage, abuse, and neglect that the monument has suffered throughout the years, all the graffiti and litter that perpetually cover it, cannot suppress the wondrous otherworldliness of the place and the sacred and spiritual energy it summons. It is, after all, a temple, a tomb built to harbour the memory of young communist and anti-fascist partisans killed in the battlefields near

Plovdiv during WWII. It is a place where their spirits hover and some of their remains lie, in a wall of metal urns in the back of the interior.

Plovdiv's Bratska Mogila deserves a detailed, careful study and interpretation, not to mention careful reconstruction. It has captured post-Stalinist visions of socialism, nationhood, and their global entanglements in remarkable ways – the forms, the symbolic and narrative content of this syncretic structure have arrested the conflicting political logics of the post-Stalinist era and its worldly entanglements in all their monumentality and tension. The subaltern and revolutionary elements of Bulgarian post-Stalinist nationalism played a crucial role in repositioning socialist Bulgaria in political solidarity with the newly independent nations from the global South, while also shaping the socialist people's political self-identifications with the Third world. However, the faith in development and modernization, the teleologies of revolution and social progress contained in the nationalist and humanist imaginaries of the post-Stalinist era colluded with West-European colonial frameworks. They converged with Eurocentric colonial hegemonies and ethnocentric visions of peoplehood, and were open to political uses with Eurocentric and ethno-centric agendas. These contradictory moments echo discordantly the dead-ends of some postcolonial nation-state projects and their socialist designs. Yet they also present a picture unique to the historical context of post-Stalinist socialism, capturing the spectrum of political forces that contained and refracted the tensions of the era.

*Bibliography* ↘

Fig. 9. Bratska Mogila as of July 2018, with the scene Robstvo in the back. Photo by the Author.









# **From anti-communism to fascism:** Ideological crusaders of the Bulgarian passive revolution versus socio-economic reality

**Bozhin Traykov**

*Image Description:*

Return of the militaristic monument built in 1934, during the authoritarian military regime of Kimon Georgiev. The shield that the lion holds shows the map of San Stefano Bulgaria – an imaginary construction of “all Bulgarian lands” that has mobilized irredentist nationalist projects during all state wars between 1912 and 1944; [Source](#)

**T**he crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born, in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear. (Gramsci, 1971: 276)

Almost three decades after Francis Fukuyama announced the “end of history” with the Soviet demise, in a recent interview he reneged on his own optimism stating that “socialism ought to come back” (Eaton, 2018).<sup>\*</sup> Why is one of the biggest advocates of neoliberalism having second thoughts about this form of late capitalism? The shock therapy of price liberalization, privatization and deregulation of the economy that was prescribed as a remedy to East European countries in their transformation from socialism<sup>\*\*</sup> to neoliberal capitalism has in some cases led to a repetition of history rather than its end. Sociologist Vassil Prodanov claims that in Bulgaria’s case the country’s socio-economic conditions came to resemble the 19th rather than 21st century (1999). Deregulation, privatization, liberalization of prices and governments’ cutting of social welfare programmes brought drastic inflation and poverty to the majority of citizens (Tsanov et al., 2013). Bulgaria’s years of neoliberal transformation have been more devastating than the two Balkan Wars and World War I put together (Prodanov, 2007).

Bulgaria, a former loyal satellite of the Soviet Union, is a member of NATO since 2004 and of the EU since 2007. At the same time, it is the poorest member of the EU with a poverty level far exceeding that of other member states (Atanasov, 2018; Kurtev, 2018). According to Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin, in the global dominance of capitalism, the US play the role of an “informal empire, which integrates all the capitalist powers into an effective system of coordination” (2004: 9). In this system the decision makers of the EU are part of the global net of capitalism with its headquarters in the US. The current social, political and economic situation in Bulgaria, therefore, is a direct result of the New World Order – an

<sup>\*</sup> I would like to thank Petar Bankov, Philipp Lottholz and Polina Manolova for their valuable help with this paper.

<sup>\*\*</sup> In accordance with scholars in the field such as Katherine Verdery and Caroline Humphry I use the term “socialism” instead of “Communism”. As emphasized by Verdery, the Soviet bloc countries “were governed by Communist parties but identified themselves as socialist republics on the path to true Communism” (1996: 235) When Communism is used in the context of the ideological narrative of the self-identified Bulgarian anti-communist intellectuals, I use that word.



attempt for American global capitalist domination, achieved by installing neoliberal regimes of governance (Robinson, 2003; Harvey, 2005).

This paper is concerned with the questions as to why and how was the dominance of neoliberalism, characterized by extreme social inequality, achieved and sustained in a society that only until recently was fairly egalitarian? Furthermore, what are the larger political consequences of this dominance? How was the position of Bulgaria as a peripheral state in the Global North sustained and how did this position contribute to the dominance of the neoliberal regime? By employing the concepts of hegemony, “passive revolution” and “coloniality of power” I am tracing the role of the Bulgarian intellectual elites in the process of transformation of state and society. My focus on elites becomes clear when I discuss Antonio Gramsci’s understanding of the function of intellectuals in society. In addition to policies of neoliberal regimes, the paper traces mechanisms of establishing and sustaining peripherality through the production of particular ideological discourses, such as the “return to Europe” and anti-communism. As I will show, the decolonial analytical framework proposed by Anibal Quijano (2000) and captured in the term “coloniality of power” presents a useful extension of Antonio Gramsci’s hegemony theory and Marxist critique of capitalism. This is because Quijano develops a clear perspective on the colonial origin and the sustained colonial logic of the global capitalist system. He emphasizes how the latter uses instruments of domination that work through violence and exclusion and are based on class, race, ethnicity and gender. He is also concerned with the justification that the global capitalist system provides for its imperial and colonial aspiration through the usage of an Eurocentric epistemological and ontological knowledge. I discuss the three concepts and their interrelatedness before turning to the analysis of the Bulgarian context.

## **Hegemony and passive revolution**

Gramsci’s concept of hegemony was an attempt to understand why after World War I the working class in the West failed to overcome the capitalist system through revolution, and instead swayed towards fascism. In Gramsci’s analysis society is made of many groups – social classes. The process of

hegemony occurs when a dominant class emerges and contests the old order. The hegemony of the dominant class always requires the building of alliances with subordinate groups to create a “homogenous politico-economic historical bloc” (Gramsci, 1971: 168). Hegemony depends on “[t]he ‘spontaneous’ consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group” (ibid: 12). In an ideal type hegemony consent is achieved when all classes accept an ideology, or a shared system of ideas and beliefs, which serve to justify the rule of the dominant class, so that its power remains unchallenged. This ideology becomes the “natural order of things” and is perceived as common sense by all. His classic example of hegemony is that of the Jacobins in France as a revolutionary party that mobilized all classes against the old elite and to a great extent included them in the political process. The role of assuring consent is reserved for *civil society*. These are institutions and organizations such as churches, schools, the press, trade unions, and all the rest “which created in people certain modes of behavior and expectations consistent with the hegemonic social order” (Cox, 1983: 164).

The concept of hegemony is in a dialectical relationship to that of the passive revolution. Passive revolution pertains to concrete historical instances in which aspects of the social relations of capitalist development are either instituted or expanded (Morton, 2010: 315). Gramsci borrows the term passive revolution from Vincenzo Cuoco who uses it to describe the Italian revolution. He expands this concept by applying it to other countries where state modernization occurs without radical Jacobin-type revolution. In Gramsci’s work passive revolution is an elitist top-down process, which does not bring about revolutionary change in class relations. The mobilization of popular support, or what Gramsci terms “the great popular masses” is used but then the majority of people is not included in the political process and their demands are ignored (Gramsci, 1971). As he points out, passive revolutions are incapable of sustaining hegemony for a longer duration, because of the lack of mass social support; the ruling elite rules through the state in a top-down manner, excluding democratic participation of all social classes. That renders the hegemony of the ruling elite fragile, because it cannot rely on a strong socio-economic base. Gramsci writes that the “State replaces the local social groups in leading a struggle of renewal”

(1971: 105-106). In this case, the use of other mechanisms of control, such as political clientelism is necessitated. Gramsci's concept of *transformism* analyzes a particular form of political clientelism – a process of co-option of the opposition. In his work, transformism is the convergence of the programmes of the Italian political parties after the Risorgimento\* to the point of lack of any difference between left and right. Hence, according to Gramsci, the two main parties disintegrate into cliques and factions and this process continues until the rise of fascism (Gramsci, 1971: 58).

Another aspect of passive revolutions is what Gramsci terms Caesarism\*\* – the rule of a dictator-like figures that unites the political process to advance certain policies. Crucial for the understanding of the difference between radical Jacobin-style revolution and passive revolution, is the process of party formation. Whereas the Jacobins represent a mass party that incorporates all social classes in the political process, the Caesarist figures rule on behalf of the upper class (Gramsci, 1971). Passive revolutions rely on mass participation for transformation of state and society but then exclude the majority from the decision-making process.

Gramsci's conceptualization of hegemony requires intellectual and moral leadership that establishes social consent. The struggle for hegemony of a ruling class happens in the realm of culture and politics in civil society and is exercised by those who have the status and social function of intellectuals (Gramsci, 1971). Adam David Morton points out that particular importance should be given to the material aspects of ideology: publishing houses, media, libraries, museums, theaters, galleries and even street names (2007: 92). In the next sections, I will go into a detailed analysis of the role that Bulgarian intellectuals and the material aspects of ideology played in the hegemonic project of the neoliberal politico-economic model imposed in the country. Gramsci's notion of hegemony should be understood as dynamic, rather than a static process: social alliances that attempt to construct, maintain and defend their hegemony can face resistance and contestation by other

\* An ideological and literary movement that resulted in the national unification of Italy.

\*\* According to Gramsci there can be a progressive and a regressive Caesarism. The progressive Caesarism advances the progressive forces, examples are Caesar and Napoleon I, while the regressive one advances the regressive forces, example is Napoleon III and Bismarck (1971: 219-221).

social forces. In the struggle for hegemony intellectuals are at the center both as participants in hegemonic and counter-hegemonic struggles.

However, the concept of hegemony should not be reduced just to the realm of ideology. Morton emphasizes the international aspect in Gramsci's understanding of hegemony; the politico-economic aspect related to the system of global capitalism with the expansion on a world scale of a particular mode of production. In the historic conjunction of neoliberalism this is the mode of flexible accumulation (Harvey, 2005). In that sense, the process of deindustrialization of the Bulgarian planned economy that manifested itself in the so-called transition towards free market economy should be examined as the relationship between core and periphery, characterized by uneven development (Morton, 2007). Thus, passive revolution can be understood as a project of local elites attempting to secure the hegemony of the global politico-economic model (the discourse of experts) and an attempt for imposing the ideological hegemony of this model within the civil society of the peripheral Bulgarian state.

## **The coloniality of power**

According to Anibal Quijano, "coloniality of power" is a global model of power through which Western Europe and later the United States have sustained their hegemony on a global scale (Quijano, 2000). Coloniality of power is driven by the rationality of Eurocentrism. Western European knowledge production bases its ontological and epistemological fundament on the belief in the superiority of the European race. In a very selective manner, this race is understood as constituted only by the Northern colonial powers and their ideological vanguard – the United States. This model is characterized by capitalist social relations and mechanisms of control over labour, gender, race and subjectivity (Quijano, 2000; 2007).

The control of labour entails categorizing on the basis of race or ethnicity. As Quijano writes, Europeans associated unpaid or non-waged labor with the dominated races because they were considered "inferior" (2000: 538). The hierarchy of peoples with those with Western European roots on top helps us understand the lower wages that non-whites, or in the Bulgarian

case, non-Western European whites continue to receive for one and same labour. The control of subjectivity also impinges on the educational process – it requires an education that imposes Western Europe as the creator of modernity and rationality, while the rest of the world is relegated to a pre-modern stage (2000: 542). Quijano emphasizes that the Eurocentric rationality is not exclusive just to Europeans, but can be acquired or at least lived up to by all “those educated under its hegemony” (2000: 540). Quijano uses the term hegemony in the Gramscian sense discussed earlier, arguing that intellectual elites educated in the Global North (Western Europe and the US) adapt the “cognitive perspective” of Europeans: “European culture was made seductive: it gave access to power” (Quijano, 2007: 169–170). The rationality of Eurocentrism codifies intersubjective and cultural relations between Western Europe and the rest of the world in categories that function as binary oppositions: East-West, primitive-civilized, mythic/magic-scientific, irrational-rational, traditional-modern. In his analysis of the Southern question, Gramsci explains how the Italian intellectual strata justified the position of South Italy as inherently poor and underdeveloped (2000). The reasons used were not the socio-economic conditions of capitalism and the North’s domination/power over the South, but nature – Southerners were deemed “biologically inferior” and “lazy, criminal and barbaric” (Gramsci, 2000: 173). Such explanations fall under the Eurocentric discourse of coloniality of power put forward by Quijano. Further below in the text, I show how such mechanisms of domination operate in the Bulgarian context by focusing on the discourse of “catching up” on the road to modernity that has been amongst the most successful strategies of the Bulgarian intellectual and political elite.\*

I find Quijano’s work on coloniality of power complementary to the critical analysis of hegemony, passive revolution and quasi-fascism in Bulgaria. The seductive aspect of the power of Eurocentrism that Quijano discusses takes its particular form among Bulgarian political and intellectual elites who present themselves as leaders and educators of irrational/uncivilized/undemocratic people. My analysis presents an extension of Quijano’s

\* The adoption of the need to “catch up” is not only characteristic of the ideological climate after 1989, but was prominent ideological postulate during the Sovietization process. An example is Georgi Dimitrov’s famous proclamation to do in ten years what capitalism has achieved in one hundred.

coloniality of power via Gramsci. This becomes apparent when discussing Bulgaria's current entanglement with the US' military alliances and war agendas and similarly in regards to Bulgaria's alliance with Nazi Germany in the past and the denial thereof.

## **Bulgarian passive revolution**

I propose to read the transformation of Bulgaria, known to Bulgarian society with the ideological term *transition*, as a form of passive revolution. David Morton writes that passive revolutions can be viewed as mechanisms that transform the state, so as to impose capitalist social relations (Morton, 2010). Rick Simon examines the Russian case of neoliberal transformation, employing Gramsci's concept of passive revolution. He argues that the concept of passive revolution gives insight to the expansion of capitalism from the core to the periphery (Simon, 2010: 446). Despite the political establishment's reliance on mass mobilization the transformation of the state is instituted in a top-down manner. Reforms are implemented by a small political elite, rather than by the "masses": in the case of the French revolution discussed by Gramsci, this happens with the decisive engagement of the radical left (*sans-culottes*) (Thomas, 2009: 147). Thus, passive revolution is an "elite engineered social and political reform" that "usually relies on foreign capital and associated ideas, while lacking national support" (Morton, 2010: 317). The Bulgarian passive revolution is a capitalist restructuring of state and society that integrates the country into the Global North as a peripheral state. In the context of the former Eastern bloc, the *nomenklatura* (party elite), did not constitute a class, because in a planned economy its members could not individually acquire private property or accumulate money as capital (ibid: 434). This process was analogous in Bulgaria. The passive revolution came in the form of *perestroika*-style reforms that enabled the formation of a ruling capitalist class, formed by parts of the *nomenklatura* and the leaders of organized crime. This class took ownership over the means of production while simultaneously enabling the penetration of foreign capital.

In the context of (post)socialist Bulgaria, we can identify two periods in this process of passive revolution. The first one comprises the ousting

of the dictator Todor Zhivkov and the coming of Gorbachev-style political figures to the front, such as Andrey Lukanov and Petar Mladenov, from within the *Politburo* (Executive Committee) of the Bulgarian Communist Party (BKP) (renamed into Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) in 1990). This period prepares the conditions for the massive privatization that takes place in the second stage. In its predatory execution this privatization takes the form of violent primitive accumulation of public and state assets (see Traykov, 2018). The first period lasts approximately from the end of 1989 until the winter of 1997. In the winter of 1997 mass unrest erupts, prompted by hyperinflation and the unwillingness or inability of the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) to quell the rise of organized crime.\* The second stage of the Bulgarian passive revolution brings about the Caesarist figure of Ivan Kostov and is characterized by neoliberal reforms of a shock therapy type. While in the first years the transformation had the euphoric support of the majority,\*\* its consequences, mostly felt in the second period – violent primitive accumulation and class polarization, rendered the sustainment of the hegemony of the neoliberal model quite arduous. Since the early 2000s, subsequent governments implemented even more severe neoliberal policies that were hard to push through in the core of the Global North. Shock therapy was followed by a shift from progressive taxation to flat tax (2008), pension privatization (2002) and ongoing dismantling of universal healthcare, all of which did not occur as a result of public debate, but on the contrary, were imposed in a top-down fashion with the help of

\* BSP was instrumental during the first period in ensuring that the reforms would be introduced and will be of benefit for its elite. During the 1990s a split within the party took place between the nostalgic preservers of the party left-wing ideals (“red grannies”) and its rising business-oriented leadership (“red cell phones”), (Asenov & Rudnikova, 1995) that indicated the emergence of a capitalist class from the old nomenklatura.

\*\* When 1989 saw an end to Zhivkov’s authoritarian rule, a massive democratization movement emerged in Bulgaria that was similar to the ones in Latin America and Central Europe. The rise of social movements that confronted the authoritarian regimes in East Europe were presented in US media (e.g. New York Times) as a triumph of Western, particularly American values over communist orthodoxy (Carreege, 2003: 300). The media completely ignored the various elements that characterized the movements of Eastern Europe. Both Sparks (2005) and Carreege (2003) document strong commitment to participatory democracy and social democratic sentiments that characterized Poland’s Solidarity movement, as well as its equivalents in Czechoslovakia and East Germany. As Sparks and Carreege point out the participants in the social movements strived for a political and economic transformation and a path to democracy that differed largely from the neoliberal shock therapy programs. In 1991 polls revealed that 62% of Bulgarians were in favour of social-democratic system based on the Swedish model, while only 12.3% favoured US-style free market capitalism (cited in Vassilev, 2003: 102).



a complacent media. The Bulgarian state became characterized by high levels of distrust towards the political elite and parliamentary politics. A public opinion poll by the European Commission shows that in 2007, when Bulgaria entered the EU, only 7% trusted political parties, while 78% of the population tended to doubt their integrity. In 2017 the situation was not much different, 13% tended to trust the parties (this rise of 6% could be explained with the increased tendencies of clientelism within the ruling political party, GERB and its allies in parliament), while 77% continue to mistrust them.\* We can argue that after the initial confrontation between BSP and ODS (United Democratic Forces)\*\* during the first stage, with the formation of NDSV (National Movement Simeon the Second) a process of what Gramsci defines as *transformism* began during the second stage. In this sense, the initial ideological confrontation between BSP and ODS in the 1990s was followed by transformism. BSP, the supposedly socialist Bulgarian party, moved away from its internal conflict and carried out some of the most damaging neoliberal reforms during the mid-2000s, such as the imposition of the flat tax and pension privatization, mentioned above.

To summarize, one of the major consequences of the restructuring from planned to market economy in Bulgaria was the brutal process of deindustrialization that came about as a result of the dismantling of horizontally and vertically integrated state enterprises (Chalakov et al., 2010). That process should be analyzed as a mechanism of the colonality of power, due to the instrumental role of foreign expertise that the political and intellectual elite took for granted. The devastating process of deindustrialization coupled with hyperinflation brought about economic and political crisis by the mid-1990s. In 1997 Bulgaria accepted an IMF currency board, making Bulgaria's financial system dependent on foreign institutions. Under the guidance of the IMF and the World Bank, the country implemented structural adjustment programmes that brought about drastic class disparity, one that continues to characterize Bulgarian society to the present day.

\* [http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Chart/getChart/themeKy/18/groupKy/85?fbclid=IwAR2V3AKWPoNCpUhEI6GGdCTtL\\_dGWrRqbzIDaUWYnauhTekIn8X6MC\\_5KIA](http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Chart/getChart/themeKy/18/groupKy/85?fbclid=IwAR2V3AKWPoNCpUhEI6GGdCTtL_dGWrRqbzIDaUWYnauhTekIn8X6MC_5KIA)

\*\* These were the two major political opponents, known as the ex-communists and the democrats, or the "red" and the "blue". They dominated the parliament in the first years after 1989, along with the Movement of Rights and Freedoms (DPS), also known as the Turkish Party.

Bulgaria joined NATO in 2004 and the EU in 2007, but as the poorest member in the EU, lacking strong economic base, its membership in those supranational structures further embedded its peripherality within the Global North. Bulgaria's subordinate position required convincing the majority of a new common sense, i.e. accepting the new postsocialist realities: class polarization, poverty, and deindustrialization, foreign exploitation of human and natural resources, etc. Yet, an ideological framework that permitted the implementation of such policies already existed. The next section offers a distinctive perspective for reading the formation of this new common sense while searching for its Eurocentric roots. Bulgarian liberal intellectuals were pivotal in this respect, as in the tradition of Eastern Europe they took up the teleological position of protectors of democracy and the free market.

## **Demonizing the past to justify the present**

The *transition* in Bulgaria required ideological persuasion and was more of a political than an economic process. In other words, society had to be persuaded to accept certain models and ideas that were developed in the core of the Global North. Since November 1989, the newly formed Bulgarian liberal elite became the main producer of intellectual knowledge; self-proclaimed leaders of civil society in academia, NGOs, think tanks and media, stood next to former ideologues of the Bulgarian Communist Party, or those linked to it, in one way or another (Lavergne, 2010)\*. An important corollary here is Gramsci's understanding of intellectuals as "the *entire* social stratum which exercises an organizational function in the wide sense – whether in the field of production, culture, or in that of political administration" (1971: 97). Anthropologist Kate Krehan writes that Gramsci was not morally assessing intellectuals as

\*In the current context key aspects of Bulgarian civil society, as understood by Gramsci, would be media, NGOs, think tanks, academic and cultural institutions, where intellectual work is produced. Some prominent liberal intellectuals include: in academia the circle around Todor Zhivkov's daughter Lyudmila, the historian Alexander Kiossev, cultural studies professor Ivaylo Ditchchev, the political scientist Evgeniy Dainov, the professor of literature Miglena Nikolchina; the founders of prominent think tanks – Ivaylo Znepolski from the influential anti-communist Institute for Research of the Recent Past (IRRP), Ivan Krastev from the Center for Liberal Strategies (CLS), Krassen Stanchev from the Institute for Market Economy (IME), and Ognyan Minchev from Institute for Regional and International Research (IRIR).

social stratum with a specific function, because he saw them in their specific historical context, in a specific time and place. Therefore, we should see them not as ‘the entire social stratum...’ but as “specific intellectuals...located within specific knowledge-producing institutions and practices” and we should explore “the links those institutions and practices have to particular classes” (Krehan 2016: 35). The postsocialist Bulgarian intellectual elite has formed and functioned as a gatekeeper of the common sense carved out by the neoliberal reformers of state and society. In that aspect, its explanatory narratives of the recent past should be read in relation to their function as gatekeepers of that common sense. Or, in their own ideological language, as democracy and free market agents (used interchangeably, as if one does not contradict the other).

The so-called transition to free market and democracy was the core project of the newly established intellectual elite in both Bulgaria and other Central and East European Countries (CEECs). The narrative of *transition* as a system of knowledge (Verdery, 1996) has to be interrelated to the Thatcherite *common sense* that “There Is No Alternative” (TINA) to neoliberalism. TINA became a hegemonic discourse in the West and, after the Soviet demise, rapidly spread throughout Eastern Europe. The euphoria after the fall of state socialism, and the popular enthusiasm for markets and democracy in CEECs, combined with the apparent victory of neoliberal capitalism in the West during the belle époque of US dominance in the 1990s (Arrighi, 1994), turned the neoliberal discourse of transition into the new common sense in the former Eastern bloc. How this occurred in the case of Bulgaria will be discussed in the following sections.

To further justify the present so-called transition to free market and democracy, the socialist past had to be demonized. To do this, and to delegitimize the victory of the Communist party that came to power in 1944, historians of postsocialism needed to expose the socialist period as tyrannical. Therefore, one of the key aspects of the attack on the recent past was that of denial of the history of class struggle in the country. Todor Hristov points out how the postsocialist historiography had to narrate a story of the secret war of a tyrannical minority (communists) against its own nation, a war that aimed to capture with violence and lies power over its existence (2013: 458). The revisionist interpretation of socialism in Bulgarian historio-

graphy presents a quite romantic image of the past before the so-called Communist coup of 1944. This romantic image downplays the authoritarian way in which the country was ruled almost throughout the whole period between the two World Wars. For example, in a recent interview historian Georgi Markov describes Boris III, the Bulgarian king of the interwar period, as “an extraordinary diplomat” and the statesman that achieved “national unification” and “saved Bulgaria’s Jews” (Markov, 2018)\*. Stefan Groueff’s book *Crown of Thorns: The Reign of King Boris III* popularized the image of the monarch, shortly before his son, Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, arrived in the Bulgarian political scene in 2000. Groueff, a political refugee, whose father was Chief of the Cabinet of King Boris III, paints a rather sympathetic, somewhat tragic image of the king. On the other hand, the repressions and violence of the Bulgarian right-wing dictatorships, brought about by military coups, the harsh socio-economic conditions, the antagonistic cultural and political climate during the authoritarian monarchist regime of the interwar period are not taken into account.

This romanticization of the Bulgarian monarchy plays with nostalgic feelings, but also functions as part of the discourse of a *return to Europe*, typical of the countries of Central Europe and imported from there by the Bulgarian liberal elite. In the years of late socialism dissident intellectuals from East Central Europe mobilized the discourse as a strategy to cut ties with the Soviet Union, by playing on the binary opposition of West versus East (Falk, 2003: 412). The demonization of the Bulgarian socialist regime required its interpretation as a standstill period that had deviated the country from its historical path to modernity. The “*return to Europe*” discourse was particularly pronounced during the presidency of Petar Stoyanov and Ivan Kostov’s government from 1997–2001, when Bulgaria was making strenuous efforts to become a member of the NATO military alliance and the EU. The ODS government of Ivan Kostov is known for launching shock therapy reforms, characterized by rapid and equally corrupt privatization (Traykov, 2018). Mitchell Orenstein and Hilary

\* Presenting the occupation of parts of Yugoslavia and Greece, claimed by nationalists as Bulgarian, as national unification, is a trope in Bulgarian historiography since 1989. The narrative of the saving of the Bulgarian Jews is only partially true. About 50,000 Jewish people inside the Third Bulgarian Kingdom were not sent to concentration camps, due to the pressure of Bulgarian civil society and political opposition to the pro-German government of PM Bogdan Filov. However, the Jews from the occupied territories were all transported to the Nazi camps.

Apple write that “the enticement of full membership” was the carrot with which the EU forced neoliberal reforms on reluctant governments in countries like Bulgaria, Romania and Slovakia (2018: 24).

By directly drawing on the *return to Europe* discourse, President Stoyanov introduced the narrative of the *civilizational choice* that Bulgaria had to make. This trope continued to emerge in media and public discourse long after Stoyanov’s presidency. In an interview for *TV Evropa* in 2011, sociologist Mira Radeva stated that during Stoyanov’s presidency “Bulgaria made an enormous, historical, revolutionary *civilizational choice*”.\* At the core of the civilizational choice narrative is the dichotomy between West/Europe, that signifies civilization, modernity, progress and the future, and East/Russia that signifies the backwardness of the communist past. This dichotomy further leads to the opposition between other ideological terms – individualism/open society/modern versus communism/closed society/non-modern. Stoyanov’s rhetorical strategy used interchangeably the need for membership in NATO and EU as guarantee that the proper civilizational choice will be made. Those who questioned the need for membership in a supranational military organization under the control of the US were dismissed as belonging to the totalitarian past. As was mentioned above, many who were discontented with the neoliberal policies and the geopolitical orientation of the state were mocked and ridiculed as “red grannies”, to signify their belonging to the past. We can look at Stoyanov’s civilizational choice, i.e. the choice to follow the so-called Euro-Atlantic *values*, as a variant of Thatcher’s TINA. The consequences of the choice materialized in the following events: the bombing of Yugoslavia during the late 1990s and the subsequent participation of Bulgarian soldiers in the US wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as the establishment of US military bases on Bulgarian soil since the early 2000s. The bombing of Yugoslavia continued for 78 days in 1999. According to Human Rights Watch there were between 428 and 529 civilian casualties, while the Serbian government claims that at least 2500 were killed.\*\* From 2003 to 2008 Bulgaria sent 500 Bulgar-

\* <http://www.petarstoyanov.com/bg/petar-stoyanov-v-mediite/petyr-stoqnov-naj-populqrnata-lichnost-na-prehoda>

\*\* <https://www.hrw.org/reports/2000/nato/Natbm200-01.htm>, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/serbia-remembers-nato-bombing-victims-03-24-2016>

ian soldiers to Iraq, 13 of whom died. Currently, Bulgaria has around 600 soldiers in Afghanistan. As a member of NATO Bulgaria is also expected to participate in a potential conflict between the US and Russia by virtue of Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty.

Two key aspects and the interrelation between them need to be taken into account when discussing the way in which anti-communism operates as public discourse and as an interpretative scheme: the presentation of the whole period of socialism (1944-1989) as totalitarian and, secondly, the reluctance to recognize the regime between the two World Wars as fascist. The demonization of the socialist state and the Communist party, before and after its coming to power in 1944, as well as the downplaying or denial of fascism serve as mechanisms for establishing the common sense of peripheral capitalism in Bulgaria. Left-wing positions, such as concerns for social and economic inequality, social justice, etc. are commonly associated with the repression of *totalitarianism*, while the refusal to treat Bulgaria's fascist past in the same manner, makes extreme right ideas permissible in society.

## **Criminalizing communism**

There have been several attempts to criminalize assessments of the past that do not follow the strict anti-communist cannon. On 26th of April 2000 the parliament passed a law that declared the communist regime criminal. This law was supported by the ruling United Democratic Forces (ODS) (Kostov's center-right coalition), as well as by the liberal *Movement of Rights and Freedoms* (DPS). The law has had only symbolic significance and has functioned as a declaration. According to it, the communist regime has "destroyed the traditional values of European civilization" and has led to "a national catastrophe" (cited in Baeva and Kalinova, 2011: 222). On 9th of September 2004 the parliament passed a declaration marking "the 60th anniversary of the establishment of the Communist regime in the country" (ibid). The text claimed that with the establishment of communism "the European path chosen by *the builders of modern Bulgaria* [italics mine] was interrupted, which lagged our progress for decades" (ibid: 224)



These declarations work as ideological exercises on three levels. On a first level, the narrative insists that there was a destruction of something defined as the values of universal European civilization. However, the historical reality of Europe from the 1920s to 1940s is that of the rise of various authoritarian and totalitarian regimes and the suppression of those fighting them, such as anti-fascists and partisans. In 1938, 16 out of 27 European states had authoritarian or totalitarian dictatorships (Poppetrov, 2008: 5) and Bulgaria is not an exception. Despite the debates over the existence of fascism, the country was an ally of Nazi Germany and no self-respecting historian denies the existence of political movements and organizations with ideologies sympathetic to Nazism and fascism in that period. Claims to the opposite mask the enormous socio-economic and political turmoil interrelated with class antagonisms in Europe between the two World Wars. They also diminish the role of anti-fascist forces. The phrase “Builders of Modern Bulgaria” comes as a direct usage from Simeon Radev’s book with the same title. Radev was a diplomat in the Third Bulgarian Kingdom (1878-1944) and a publicist whose book documents the political process in the first decade of the nation-state. The use of this particular title exemplifies the Eurocentric notion that the political elite of the 19th century had to be European builders who followed some universal European civilizational model. Such a claim in an official political document shows how the discourse of coloniality of power operates in a region peripheral to European powers such as the Balkans.

On a second level, in order to affirm the “return to Europe” narrative, the political establishment had to negate the notion of socialism as a project of modernity by employing the binary opposition East versus West. Therefore, the statement that communism led to “decades of lagging behind” denies the Soviet model as a project of modernity. While the violence on a massive scale and the repressions of the Stalinist era (1945-56) should not be neglected, the results of the socialist modernization are evident. The industrialization that Bulgaria underwent from the 1950s onwards was followed by a process of rapid decrease of inequality, illiteracy and provision of universal healthcare. By 1988, a year before the end of Zhivkov’s regime Bulgaria’s Gini index was 22 (Tsanov et al., 2013), closer to the one of EU countries. In comparison, by 2017 the Gini coefficient rose to 40.2 (Atanasov, 2018), which made Bulgaria the only country in the EU with a Gini index above 40, thus bringing it closer to the Third rather than the First World.

On a third level, the criminalization of the past is directly related to the “return to Europe” discourse associated with the “civilizational choice” of membership in NATO and the EU. A recent manifestation of this effort was a declaration by five non-parliamentary represented parties demanding the persecution of “those who deny the criminal character of the communist regime” and which at the same time insists that Bulgaria should be “a proud member of NATO”.<sup>\*</sup> Here, it becomes apparent how the attempts to demonize the past of the socialist state go hand in hand with the justification of Bulgaria’s participation in a military alliance, as part of which Bulgaria was involved in the bombing of a neighbouring country (Yugoslavia) twenty years ago. It is important to keep in mind that this declaration has been produced amidst the ongoing hostilities between the US and Russia. In December 2010 the foreign ministers of Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Latvia, Hungary and Romania made an attempt to pass a law throughout EU member states that criminalizes communism in the same way as Nazism.<sup>\*\*</sup> Perhaps, sensing the danger that the criminalization of communism can bring about a denial of the role of the USSR in defeating fascism and Nazism, as well as diminishing of the history of anti-fascist struggles in Europe, the attempt faced the opposition of West European countries.

We see that so far efforts to criminalize the past have been unsuccessful. Their symbolic significance as part of ideological war of position, however, should not be underestimated. As I demonstrate later in the text with the example of the monument of the victims of communism, the revisionist approach to the history of the socialist past has opened the gates to the rehabilitation of figures that have committed criminal acts against civilians during Bulgaria’s alignment with Nazi Germany. The demand to prosecute people holding “wrong” conceptions of Bulgarian socialist history in fact presents a totalitarian impulse on behalf of the *transition*’s politicians and intellectuals. The criminalization of communism can be interpreted as an attempt to impose a one-sided view on history that negates the context in which anti-fascist struggles led by communist parties all over Europe

<sup>\*</sup> [https://www.actualno.com/politics/pet-partii-poiskaha-kriminalizirane-na-otrichaneto-na-prestypnija-harakter-na-komunizma-news\\_657472.html](https://www.actualno.com/politics/pet-partii-poiskaha-kriminalizirane-na-otrichaneto-na-prestypnija-harakter-na-komunizma-news_657472.html)

<sup>\*\*</sup> <https://dariknews.bg/novini/sviat/ek-otkaza-da-se-kriminalizira-otrichaneto-na-prestypleniqta-na-komunizma-641767>

emerged. In sum, it is an attempt to criminalize history revealing the deep contradictions of capitalism and the attempt to resolve them with the rise of fascism. It is also an attempt to erase a hundred years old tradition of left-wing intellectualism in Bulgaria.

The criminalization of history should be viewed in relation to the attempts to change collective memory. The campaign for the renaming of cities, villages, streets, administrative and institutional buildings (Baeva and Kalinova, 2011: 64-86) should be situated as part of this ideological war of positions over the past. The process has started with the change of the name of the country, on 15th November 1990, when the Republic of Bulgaria replaced the People's Republic of Bulgaria. One prominent exception is the retaining of the name of Bulgarian People's Bank, which appears cynical in light of the imposed currency board from 1997. Old clerical and monarchic names of places and streets are reinstated. Baeva and Kalinova (2011) point out that not only the names of partisans and communist political figures are removed but also the ones of any left-wing political figures, including agrarian leaders. The names of international left-wing leaders and intellectuals, such as Salvador Allende, Patrice Lumumba, Henry Barbusse, also gradually disappear. Streets carrying the word "revolution" are also renamed. All of these changes have significant political implications that combine with the ongoing process of history rewriting and the demonization of left ideals.

A very significant aspect of this rewriting of history concerns the years of King Boris III and his collaboration with Adolf Hitler. Contemporary Bulgarian historiography is at best ambiguous in its assessment of his regime and its alliance with Nazi Germany. Roumen Daskalov, who has mapped the various tendencies in modern Bulgarian historiography, sides with those denying the existence of fascism in Bulgaria and summarizes their position with the question: "If there was no German occupation (and relatively independent regime) and fascism was not in power, who were the partisans fighting against?" (2011: 276). This question is quite revealing of the inability or the unwillingness of producers of current Bulgarian history to grasp the social antagonisms within the capitalist system. Their premises rest on the existence of some kind of external threat that disrupts the harmony of a system of class oppression. Daskalov further claims that the delegitimation of the communist regime as totalitarian partially legitimized the old regime





The memorial of the victims of Communism in Sofia; Source: Wikipedia

of the monarch that he, along with current Bulgarian historiography, insists is not fascist. Yet, the more important issue here is not whether the regime itself was fascist or not, but the fact that by diminishing the significance of fascism and the monarch's collaboration with Nazi Germany and by instead presenting it as a strategic move to fulfil the "national unification", Bulgarian revisionists are (perhaps indirectly) responsible for the fascination with fascism in the present.\*

## Sofia Platform Foundation

An example of the search outside of the Bulgarian peripheral capitalist system for an explanation of its disastrous consequences is a recent

\* The rise of nationalism among young people becomes very clear in Adela Peeva's documentary, Long Live Bulgaria. Peeva documents a rise of fascination with ethnic nationalism, xenophobia and irredentism among young people in major cities in Bulgaria.

report of *Sofia Platform* foundation (SP). The foundation itself is a typical representative of the numerous think tanks operating in Bulgaria, producing explanatory narratives for the *failed transition to democracy* that exhibits the paternalistic Eurocentric attitude of liberal intellectuals. In a recent article entitled *The Generation of the Transition is a Ticking Time Bomb*, SP director, Luiza Slavkova accuses Bulgarians of having a “twisted and irrational idea of democracy”.<sup>\*</sup> Concerned with the rise of undemocratic attitudes among young people, Slavkova fails to search for an explanation within the very structure of postsocialist peripheral capitalism and instead puts the blame on corruption, as something removed from the logic of the system. Another key culprit is the culture of the past – here the explanatory mechanism functions as follows: young people have irrational ideas about democracy because of the legacy of Communism. In a neoliberal cultural environment that promotes consumerism as the highest value of democracy (recall George Bush’s plea to keep shopping after 9/11), the authors of the report are reprimanding young people (the generation of the transition) for their understanding of democracy as “the ability to buy everything” (ibid). Yet, the explanation is once again casted in the past – the perception of democracy as the ability to consume is a compensatory mechanism, due to the economy of scarcity of the socialist past.

Such explanatory narratives come close to what Gramsci examines in the Southern question – it is the culture of the people that makes them lazy, irrational and barbaric, or in the Bulgarian case, prone to corruption, which in turn explains Bulgaria’s peripheral status, not the politico-economic and geopolitical realities of late capitalism. Therefore, the narrative follows the binary oppositions mentioned above – where the West is rational and Bulgarians are irrational. As the above example suggests, the Bulgarian experts have clearly distanced themselves from the rest of the “people”; they have adopted the elitist position of top-down knowledge producers and the role of educators. Educators who provide a very narrow understanding of the past and the present, who fail to see the irresolvable contradictions between democracy and the free market.

The socialist past is also to blame for young people’s claim that “edu-

<sup>\*</sup> [https://www.dnevnik.bg/bulgaria/2018/11/10/3343329\\_pokolenieto\\_na\\_prehoda\\_e\\_bomba\\_s\\_chasovnikov\\_mehanizum](https://www.dnevnik.bg/bulgaria/2018/11/10/3343329_pokolenieto_na_prehoda_e_bomba_s_chasovnikov_mehanizum)



cation and healthcare should be free” (ibid). Luiza Slavkova’s explanation for this is symptomatic of the anti-communists’ disdain for everything socialist: “attitudes and beliefs are transferred to the younger generations from their parents” and have to do with unrealistic expectations of the state (ibid). The expectation of a welfare state that administers a minimum level of socio-economic rights, such as the right to education and healthcare is deemed unrealistic. The conclusion once again emphasises the need for proper education about the socialist past.

*Sofia Platform* has worked on several projects in this direction. The organization has created a manual for students and teachers with a series of lessons, entitled *What Happened before 1989: Historical Collection about Communism in Bulgaria*. The authors of this manual, such as Evelina Kelbecheva, Ivan Elenkov, Ivaylo Znepolski, Alexander Kiossev, Momchil Metodiev, are well-known representatives of the Bulgarian anti-communist intellectual circle. In Ivan Elenkov’s lesson entitled *Everyday Life as a Mirror of the Regime*, we read that the period of communism destroyed “the historically established hierarchy of society or the *naturally formed* ... positions and relations between social groups” (2017: 11, italics mine). He continues by claiming that this has required “the eradication of the elites – politicians, industrialists, bankers, big landowners...” (ibid). Thus, the class antagonisms, especially intensified after the disastrous consequences of World War I that brought about poverty, debt and demographic crisis, are normalized as something natural. That way the events of 1944 and the formation of the People’s Republic of Bulgaria are presented as an unjustified act of a few, imposed on the Bulgarian people by a foreign power (the Soviet Union). Later in the text, labour unions are described as being a mechanism for control and exploitation of the worker, while the social benefits that the unions provided are said to have been used for “social discrimination” (ibid: 16). Comparing this narrative to the current conditions of non-unionized labour, where blatant disregard not only for workers, but also for basic human rights is the norm (Medarov et al., 2018), comes to show the outcome of such one-sided ideological renderings.

All of the manual’s lessons end with questions and exercises. For example, the question at the end of Elenkov’s lesson asks students to list all the activities in their everyday life that would be considered illegal during the



“communist regime” (Elenkov, 2017: 23). The lack of nuances in such an ideologically-loaded question situates the functions of the manual more in the realm of propaganda than education. Based on this logic, and using the language of the liberal elite, today we should ask the question: How many Bulgarian citizens enjoying the freedom of democracy and free market economy are capable of paying their water, electricity or gas bills, and what percentage can do so without undergoing serious strain on their personal budget? Ivan Elenkov paints a picture of everyday life in the period of state socialism without colours other than grey and black. In this picture socialist citizens are deprived of agency. Elenkov’s text has to be analyzed as being a part of the dominant ideological constellation of anti-communism.

## **The memorial of the victims of communism**

The case of the memorial of the victims of communism is particularly interesting due to the choice of place. The memorial was erected in 1999 during the presidency of Petar Stoyanov and the ODS government of Ivan Kostov. It consists of a chapel and a black wall resembling the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington. It is close to the *National Palace of Culture*, which is symbolically one of the great achievements of socialism associated with the name of Lyudmila Zhivkova. In fact, the People’s Palace of Culture “Lyudmila Zhivkova”, as it was known before 1990, was built in 1980 at Zhivkova’s insistence. There is a clear contrast between the National Palace of Culture and the presence of this memorial. Zhivkova’s efforts in the late 1970s to promote peaceful cultural interaction still have a material presence. For example, *Kambanite* Monument (The Bells) was inaugurated in 1979 when the first Children’s Peace Assembly was held under the patronage of UNESCO with the motto “Unity, Creativity, Beauty”. By 1989, four such assemblies were held in Sofia with a total of 3,900 children from 138 countries and 14,000 children from Bulgaria participating in them.

The sinister memorial of the victims of Communism, which has about 7,000 names, is in striking contrast to the symbolic representation of the Children’s Assembly and the National Palace of Culture. The monument compels us to “Bow down!” because “The suffering of our people is built in

this wall". Inside the chapel we can see the words "To all Bulgarian martyrs". But who are the actual victims of communist terror, whose suffering we should worship? Central to the monument are the names of those sentenced to death by the People's Court (delegitimized by the words "so-called"). These are the politicians of the governments responsible for the alliance with Nazi Germany and for Bulgaria's involvement in World War II. Among the names of the victims, we also see that of General Hristo Lukov, leader of the fascist *Union of Bulgarian National Legionnaires*. But particularly stark is the case of Konstantin Yordanov, an officer who in 1943 ordered the murder of eighteen people in the village of Yastrebinovo, six of them children. Yordanov, one of the most sinister teachers (this is his profession) in Bulgarian history, now has the status of a victim of communist terror, which makes him a martyr of democracy. Thus, in the immediate vicinity of a building associated with the founder of the Children's Assembly for Peace is a monument that has proclaimed a child murderer for a martyr.

To summarize, the building of monuments as this one tries to impose a one-sided perspective about the recent past, while failing to reflect on present tendencies that are equally problematic, such as attempts to criminalize the past both on national and supranational level; renaming of places, streets, etc.

## **Patriots and other morbid symptoms**

In contrast to Elenkov's argument, when analyzing socialist-era mass gatherings, parades, manifestations, and rituals at work and home environments, Alexei Yurchak argues that not the crude propagandistic elements of ideology are at work but the subtle moments of friendship and camaraderie that form in such ideological spaces (Yurchak, 2006). This might explain what he calls the "paradox of late socialism" (ibid; Boyer and Yurchak, 2010): the Soviet citizen did not wholeheartedly participate in the crude ideological rituals that the Communist party enforced and was at times indifferent, at times cynical about the state's crude ideology. But oftentimes, real humane values, ethics, friendships, and creative possibilities were opened up in such practices and spaces, even if they may have contradicted the state's official

goals and policies. It is these “unintended” experiences that underwrite the phenomenon of post-Soviet nostalgia: the values and ideals of socialism – altruism, selflessness, equality, community, ethical relations and that exist outside the party state’s structures. I argue that it is precisely those openings that the process of decommunization has closed down. It has also made the nuanced processing of, and debate on, the past impossible through the classification of all things socialist as totalitarian, inhumane and violent.

The vacuum left by this amnesia was then filled by the rise of nationalism with fascistic tendencies. The ideals of socialism were discarded and substituted by the values of neoliberal capitalism. What are the new values? The entrepreneurial *homo oeconomicus* subject of neoliberalism blurs the ethical lines between virtuous and evil, right and wrong, true and false. The mind view of *homo oeconomicus* operates “in a two-dimensional existence between profit and loss” (Feldner and Vighi, 2014: 22). In a neoliberal ideological climate such values as friendship, cooperation, and responsibility for the vulnerable are often deemed irrelevant. Fascism’s notion of the common good is directed only to those belonging to the national body, a body that becomes narrower and narrower through a process of exclusion of various groups.

In recent years we are witnessing numerous examples of forms of populist mobilizations in Bulgaria that can be characterized as fascist. The waves of right-wing extremism that are flooding Europe have become stronger after the 2008 financial crisis and subsequent onslaught of austerity programs in the EU. Bulgarians’ anger provoked by the outcomes of the country’s transformation to a capitalist socio-economic, political and cultural system, often finds its misplaced target in minorities and other “threats” to the nationalist fantasy. In 2011 violence erupted in the village of Katunitsa that spread into nationwide protests in the major cities. The events were labeled in Bulgarian and Western media as “anti-Roma riots” and were condemned by the UN.\* The case of Katunitsa needs to be analyzed in the context of the increased intolerance towards Roma people and the growing popularity of nationalist projects, such as *Attack (Ataka)*. Being at the center of the Katunitsa riots, *Ataka* capitalized on the fear of the powerful and influential *Movement of Rights and Freedoms (DPS)*, known as the Turkish and Roma

\* [https://www.dnevnik.bg/evropa/prava\\_v\\_es/2011/10/04/1168522\\_oon\\_osudi\\_antiromskite\\_demonstracii\\_v\\_bulgariia/](https://www.dnevnik.bg/evropa/prava_v_es/2011/10/04/1168522_oon_osudi_antiromskite_demonstracii_v_bulgariia/)

Party, and gained major electoral success in 2013. The most recent case of violent anti-Roma outbursts happened at the end of 2018 at the village of Voyvodinovo, where attacks on the Roma community were encouraged by military officials and the Minister of Defense himself (Draganov, 2019). This was followed by a process of systematic destruction of Roma houses, under the pretext of their “illegal building”.

During social unrests in the winter of 2013, provoked by high electricity and gas bills, *Ataka* and other nationalist projects relied on populist (nationalization of monopolistic foreign energy companies) and anti-Roma/anti-Turkish/anti-refugee rhetoric to mobilize support.\* The trend towards growing nationalist sentiments resulted in the formation of the current government – a coalition between the conservative *Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria* (GERB) and *United Patriots* (Obedineni Patrioti, OP) – a nationalist alliance consisting of *Ataka*, *Inner Macedonian Revolutionary Organization* (VMRO) and *National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria* (NFSB). The current coalition of nationalist parties in the Bulgarian parliament constitutes an interesting concoction of interests.

*Ataka* has articulated a rhetoric very close to that of Bulgarian fascist movements from the interwar period. Even the name of the party itself is equivalent to the newspaper of the short-lived *National Socialist Bulgarian Worker's Party* that was modeled after Hitler's *NSDAP*. *Ataka's* political and media discourse combines various aspects of the narratives of xenophobic nationalist organizations of 1920s and 30s, more or less influenced by and sympathetic to Italian Fascism and German Nazism. Characteristic are the strong anti-communist and anti-Roma sentiments, combined with calls for the nationalization of resource extraction and utility sectors. The leader, Volen Siderov uses an anti-colonial rhetoric mixed with conspiratorial narratives, with pronounced anti-Semitic tones, as evident in *Ataka's* 2013 election manifesto, the “Siderov plan”. In the early 2000s when *Ataka* emerged on the political scene, it was the only major political party to demand the nationalization of privatized public and state resources and enterprises and the annulation of concessions to foreign resource extraction companies.

\* Roma are depicted in media and political discourse as those living on the back of tax-paying Bulgarians. See for example Vania Grigorova's research on the mechanisms of instigating confrontation between the lower classes based on ethnic stereotypes (2016).

Nevertheless, once in power as part of the coalition, all of these demands were quickly forgotten.

The recently resigned, after more than half a year of protests, Vice Prime Minister, Valeri Simeonov, formerly from *Ataka*, is the founder of the *National Front for Salvation of Bulgaria (NFSB)*. Prior to this, Simeonov (with two other businessmen) founded SKAT cable network, which functioned as *Ataka*'s official media channel until 2009. SKAT's programs have been a combination of racist, xenophobic, anti-Roma, anti-Muslim, and anti-communist narratives, popularizing the theory of neo-Ottomanism, as well as various other conspiracy theories. In 2017 Simeonov, who is openly racist and xenophobic (Draganov, 2017), took the position of head of the *Bulgarian Council of Ethnic Minority Integration*.

Since its formation in 1990 *VMRO*, as the successor of a terrorist organization with the same name, has remained a right-wing nationalist party. During the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999, it led a virulent anti-Serbian campaign in support of the then Prime Minister Ivan Kostov's decision to give NATO permission to use Bulgaria's airspace. In addition to being personally responsible for inciting anti-Roma hatred and encouraging violence in Voyvodinovo, the current Minister of Defense, *VMRO*'s leader Krassimir Karakachanov, was recently accused of being part of a scheme trading with Bulgarian passports. As a member of the European Parliament, *VMRO*'s Angel Dzhambazki voted against the criminalization of fascist and neo-Nazi parties. Similarly to *Ataka*, *VMRO* employs strong anti-communist and anti-Roma rhetoric.

While *United Patriots* have continued to position themselves as catering to the national interest, they have become one of the key players in the ongoing implementation of neoliberal policies, such as the privatization of public and natural resources. The nationalists' disdain for social programs that ameliorate the conditions of those vulnerable and in need was recently demonstrated by Valeri Simeonov. Simeonov showed his contempt for the mothers of children with disabilities, calling them "a few shrivelled women, whose children are probably not sick".\*

In fact, the surge to positions of power of nationalist parties, not only in Bulgaria but throughout Europe shows that while presenting themselves as

\* <https://www.dnes.bg/stranata/2018/10/22/kreslivi-jeni-a-decata-im-uj-bolni-kolko-mogat-da-ponesat-maikite.391196>



alternative to neoliberalism, they are ready to implement neoliberal policies even more fiercely than centrist governments. Alfredo Saad Filho and Ben Fine (2018) argue that the rise to power of various nationalist formations marks the shift towards authoritarian neoliberalism, characterized by disregard for keeping its democratic façade and the increased implementation of coercive mechanisms of control. A recent example is the so-called “slave law” in Hungary under the nationalist regime of Victor Orban. The law increased the overtime labour employers can demand from their workers from 250 to 400 hours a year.\* The case of *OP*’s neoliberal agenda (while posturing as patriots defending the nation-state) also serves as an example of this shift. Here, I have shown the emergence and consolidation of fascist tendencies in recent dynamics in Bulgarian political movements and key politicians and their establishment and promotion into governmental or otherwise powerful positions.

## Conclusion

The rise of right-wing populism in Bulgaria is a form of misrecognized class anger interrelated to the dissonance between the official hegemonic liberal anti-communist framework and people’s discontent with their existence in a peripheral capitalist state. Anti-communism dominates civil society institutions and organizations, demonizes left politics and ideals, but cannot quell the anger and discontent of many over their everyday existence. Bulgaria seems to be caught in the trap where the “old” that declares itself “new” refuses to die producing various morbid symptoms. Not surprisingly for Gramsci fascism is the passive revolution of the 20th century and in its objective was not too different from that of liberalism – he interpreted both as political strategies for modernization of ruling elites, implemented to avoid revolution and mass participation of the people in a struggle that changes social relations. Besides exposing how this passive revolution has played out in the context of postsocialist Bulgaria, this contribution has also pointed towards a more global perspective, following Quijano, on the ‘colonial’

\* <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-46651428>

nature of neoliberal capitalism and Western-dominated geopolitics, as they made their way into the country. In a state that has become peripheral to the global capitalist order the anger generated by the conditions of extreme social inequality is misdirected toward various treacherous “others” and the intellectual elite should be held responsible for this misdirection. The mantra of free market and democracy was directly imported to the former Eastern bloc as part of the hegemonic political economic project with its expansion of the mode of flexible accumulation. Yet, after the disastrous transformation from state socialism to capitalism, Bulgaria, as other countries in Eastern Europe, was practically relegated from the Second (the socialist bloc) to the Third World. This becomes clear if one looks at the structure of deindustrialized Bulgarian economy with its dire consequences for the majority of workers (see Vassilev, 2003; Tsoneva, Medarov, Nikolova, 2018; Traykov, 2018). It is not surprising that the more severe the current socio-economic crisis, the more intense the search for culprits in the past becomes, as was shown with the case of *Sofia Platform* foundation. The Bulgarian liberal elite, strictly modeled on its Western counterparts, fails to see the crisis within the structure of capitalism itself and continues its perpetual search for evildoers from the past – bad communists who taught Bulgarians to rely on the state, instead of on themselves. The ongoing production of anti-communist narratives is part of a larger ideological constellation with the objective to sustain Bulgaria’s peripheral position inside the global neoliberal order. The ongoing hegemony by default of the neoliberal politico-economic project has dire political consequences within Bulgaria with the rise of fascist and xenophobic movements and sentiments. Quijano’s analysis of the geopolitical significance of the colonality of power provides a larger context to Gramsci’s concepts of hegemony and passive revolution that help us understand why in times of severe crisis of capitalism, once the left is marginalized or defeated, the vacuum is filled by the rise of fascism.

**Bibliography** ➤







# Postcoloniality as peripherality in Bosnia and Herzegovina

**Danijela Majstorović**

*Image Description:*

The image depicts the death of David Dragičević which triggered daily protests in Banja Luka from the day his body was found on March 24 until today

Source: [Vladimir Šagadin](#)



## On being peripheral

**T**wo wars and their aftermath mark Bosnia and Herzegovina's (BiH) statehood: World War II (WWII) and the 1992-1995 war. It was During WWII that the modern Socialist Republic of BiH (SRBiH) and the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) were founded, as the State Anti-Fascist Council for the National Liberation of BiH (ZAVNOBiH)\* became the highest governing organ of the antifascist movement in the country in 1943. SRBiH was built on the famous principle that it was "neither Serb, nor Croat nor Muslim, but Serb and Croat and Muslim". After the 1992-1995 war, the new BiH state was created during the peace talks in Dayton, Ohio\*\* as a federation of two entities: Republika Srpska (RS) and the Federation of BiH (FBiH) along with the Brčko district. The Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA) thus legitimized the ethno-nationalist division of the country marked by ethnic hatred, and genocide. As one of the most peripheral European countries today – following the 1992-1995 war and the strong involvement of the international community in the peace and statebuilding processes thereafter – BiH in many ways remains locked in a protocolonial situation, which is why it is important to analyse it both as a postsocialist, post-war periphery and a society under a twenty-three year long neocolonial administration.

The paper seeks to explore the conditions and constitutive factors of multiple peripherality/marginality as a result of wartime destruction and an uncertain post-war transition. It further examines these conditions in the light of new struggles against exploitation and domination articulated as decolonial acts of resistance and with a reference to a formerly existing socialist modernity. By delineating BiH's empirical and historical "postcolonial" and "postsocialist" specificity and singularity (Hallward, 2001), I hope not only to add to the dialogue between the posts, but also to contribute to "critical investigations of the complexities of the socialist period" and the production of "decolonial scholarship in the region" (Karkov and Valiavicharska, 2018: 1).

\* ZAVNOBiH stands for Zemaljsko Antifašističko Vijeće Narodnog Oslobođenja Bosne i Hercegovine.

\*\* The General Framework Agreement for Peace in BiH or the Dayton Agreement is the peace agreement reached at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base near Dayton, Ohio, United States, on 1 November 1995, and was formally signed in Paris, France, on 14 December 1995. These accords put an end to the three and a half year-long war in BiH.

In doing so, I propose alternative decolonial conceptualizations and readings to the problems reflected in contemporary struggles on the ground.

Firstly, I address relevant theoretical grounds of peripherality and marginality, differences between colonial, postcolonial and decolonial perspectives and the Yugoslav socialist modernity as an intervening variable in these trajectories. The vantage point of the decolonial perspective does not neglect the problems of the actually lived state socialism in SFRY (Karkov and Valiavicharska, 2018), but values its socialist emancipatory potential, especially in comparison to the post-1995 period marked by repatriarchization and retraditionalization, international interventionism, and ethno-nationalist capitalism.

Secondly, I explain the connections of these markers to BiH's postsocialist condition by reflecting on the specificity and singularity of the country's peripherality/marginality. BiH is both specific and singular compared to other former Yugoslav countries because of its contextual conditions, including the 1992-1995 war, the post-1995 state and peacebuilding practices of the international community, and because of the different phases of politico-economic restructuring from 1995 until today (recontextualized as the country's Europeanization and democratization).

Lastly, I analyse the struggles on the ground that challenge the practices of postsocialist domination of both local and international authorities who have been creating and exploiting Bosnia's post-war state of emergency to their own ends. I refrain from treating these struggles as attempts at "becoming the centre" but see them as an opening of "space(s) of resistance and alternatives to both capital and coloniality from the locale of Eastern Europe" (Tichindeleanu, 2011) and the "organisation of alternative and resistant modernities" (Karkov and Valiavicharska, 2018: 6) that are able to offer different, better lives for Bosnia's people.

## **Some theoretical concerns: from world-systems to postcoloniality via the socialist past**

Wallerstein's world-systems theory (1974) accounts for the social structure of global inequality by dividing global society into core, periphery and semi-periphery. He understands peripherality to be a state and a position

with socio-economic origins. World-systems theory works with relatively unchangeable and predefined categories which define a country's position solely according to its socio-economic, core- and state-centric make-up. While the core exploits the periphery, the periphery is dependent on core countries for capital. Furthermore, the semi-periphery shares features of both core and periphery while occupying an "in-between" position of being. From a world-systems perspective, the semi-periphery is therefore a "permanent feature of the world-system" (Arrighi, 1985: 245), characterized by asymmetrical power relations (Jessop, 1994), exclusion from highly developed capitalist networks (Syrett, 2012), and a greater level of industrialization in relation to the periphery.

In world-systems scholarship, SFRY, as a Second World, socialist, Eastern European country, was first classified as semi-peripheral in the 1960s and 1970s (Wallerstein, 1974) and some thirty years later as a "periphery" (Dunaway and Clelland, 2017: 415). In terms of different textual collocations, BiH has also at times been referred to as "semi-periphery" (Bonfiglioli, 2015; Blagojević, 2009) and, more recently, as a "super-periphery" (Bartlett 2009), or "periphery of the periphery" (Bechev, 2012). The reason for this "escalating" peripherality is not just the terrible devastation suffered during the 1992-1995 war, but also the exceptionally high unemployment\* and low growth rates during the country's postsocialist phase, marked by incompetent, corrupt governments, migration processes and crises spilling over from the EU.

These centre/periphery classifications are further complicated by intersectional axes of oppression, both spatial and non-spatial. The non-spatial dimensions are partly structural, exploitative and capitalist, and partly historical, *longue durée* dimensions in which the so-called peripheral selves are socially nested within both the spatial, historical and structural relations. To account for spatial as well as non-spatial dimensions of peripheralization and the internal and external processes creating peripherality in a non-traditional periphery, I use the notion of multiple peripherality/marginality.

Multiple peripherality/marginality reflects itself more as an *in-between-ness*, rather than *edgeness* (Herrschel, 2012: 31). I thus treat being marginal

\* According to the most recent statistics, unemployment rate in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) averages around 42.39 per cent (2017-2018).

and peripheral more as a *both-and*, rather than an *either-or* thing. It also accounts for the different ways of being peripheral and marginal – both in the supposed centre and the periphery. There is a difference between living as a middle-class person in Swedish Lapland and being a poor, black, unemployed mother in the Bronx, just as you can hold a more central position in the periphery: like belonging to the high echelons of the Party of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD) or the Party of Democratic Action (SDA)\* in BiH. Both centre and periphery have suffered from varying degrees of socio-economic peripheralization as there are social groups and individuals who are in different proximity to the communication systems and the controlling centres of the economy (Fudurić, 2007: 4). In BiH, this has been exacerbated due to untrammelled neoliberal capitalism that was ushered through war and privatization but also through different biopolitical regimes producing peripherality by marginalizing ethnic others both symbolically (with no hope of common life and togetherness like in SFRY), and demographically by implementing ethnic cleansing campaigns. More recently, biopolitical regimes of state governance have been focused not only on cleansing Serbs from the Federation of BiH and Bosniaks from Republika Srpska but on members of the dominant ethnicity. One such example is the police brutality unleashed against participants in the *Justice for David* movement (I return to this later in the article) and the subsequent departure of public figures and intellectuals whose life has been put in danger.\*\*

In a nutshell, BiH is not just a political periphery in relation to the rest of the EU but it has been continuously peripheralized from within by ruling oligarchs doing all they can to secure their untrammelled political and economic power while leaving most people at the socio-economic margin. Socio-economic marginalization has so far resulted in migration and public protest (I focus on both of these later in the article), both of which emerge as reactions to the dominant sense of injustice and a lack of political alternative in an already divided and impoverished country.

\* SNSD (Stranka Nezavisnih Socijaldemokrata) is now considered the most powerful political party in BiH and the Republika Srpska entity. Their leader, Milorad Dodik became the Serb member of the three-partite rotating Presidency of BiH. SDA (Stranka Demokratske Akcije) is the strongest political part in the Federation of the BiH and their current representative in the BH Presidency is Šefik Džaferović.

\*\* Srđan Šušnica, Davor Dragičević and Daniela Ratešić are some of the critics of the regime who were forced to leave BiH after receiving death threats.

German language encompasses the subtle difference between the terms *marginal* and *peripheral* better than English. In German to be *am Rande der Gesellschaft* is to be socially marginalized or to be at the edge, while *die Peripherie* (e.g. *der Stadt*) has more spatial connotations. Despite a greater degree of synonymy, “peripheral” and “marginal” still maintain their distinctiveness, even in English. While marginalization can be considered a stronger form embedded in social and economic powers and structures (Danson and de Souza, 2012), peripheralization may also be “actively created, intentionally or not, in the form of exclusions and marginalizations of actors through the ways in which policies and power are implemented and defined” (Herrschel, 2012: 30), something that was seen in the examples from the previous paragraph.

*These peripheries are not merely the result of geographic distance from a core in the sense of a distance decay relationship in a neo-classical explanation, but rather need to be also understood as the result of social relationships in a behavioural context. Here, communicative, participative distance to functional networks between policymaking actors matters, and thus the scope to participate in, and influence, decision-making and outcomes. Marginality is thus not merely about infrastructure alone and the notion of ‘getting to places’, although this may have a role when it comes to enabling face-to-face contacts at an operational level. (Herrschel, 2012:32)*

To say that periphery is always constructed *vis-à-vis* an imagined centre renders it as an inherently *relational concept*, a condition characterized or constituted by relations extending far beyond spatially conditioned disparities. This relational character of core and periphery is implicitly characterized by *connotations of power and/or inequality*, suggesting that periphery should be understood as a “subordinate of the core” in “a vicious cycle created in space over time and riven by distance” (Anderson, 2000: 92).

The 1992-1995 war in BiH and the transition of the country to a free market economy and “(il)liberal”\* democracy from the previous system

\* Ignatieff (2014) defines “illiberal” democracy as a chameleon-like regime that is “authoritarian in political form, capitalist in economic and nationalists in ideology” (Ignatieff, 2014: n.p.)



of state socialism and self-management has in fact produced not one but several peripheries in the former Yugoslav spaces and has multiple times marginalized its population. It has left most people in a peripheral position in relation to an imagined centre due to socio-economic migrations and brain drain, infrastructural devastation, loss of major industries and the inability to ever “catch up” in terms of economic development. This state of peripherality/marginality also refers to the wealth distribution and job creation in the new order which has to a great degree depended on the networks created by post-war elites, leaving the majority on the verge of poverty and survival.

Whereas the SFRY had a privileged international role after WWII, being “between the East and the West,” after its breakup the newly-formed states were removed from this former Second World centrality. While new “ethnopolitical entrepreneurs” (Brubaker, 2002: 166) benefited from ethnic nationalism and ethnic cleansing, for others – those who still see the socialist Yugoslav period as a period of modernity (see Pavićević in Kožul, 2018 and Dvornsek-Zorko, this issue) – Yugoslavia has remained an open wound. The 1992-1995 war was the rupture in which the Yugoslav socialist legacy died – the baby was proverbially thrown out with the bathwater and the ethnonationalist and capitalist hegemony won as the mainstream political vision. Post-war historical revisionism of real socialism came hand in hand with the new hegemonic order, paving the way for the processes of external and internal privatizations and destruction by the elites at the expense of most citizens. BiH has thus been peripheralized multiple times – from the inside by local ethnonationalist political elites who control everything, from police to the media, universities and public property (that can be privatized as they see fit), and from the outside by interference of the neighbouring Serbia and Croatia and the tutelage of the international community.

Grosfoguel (1996) reminds us that nationalism provides Eurocentric solutions to a Eurocentric global problem as it reproduces an internal coloniality of power within each nation-state and reifies the nation-state as the privileged location of social change. In BiH, the two entities, the mini nation-states created by the DPA after the 1992-1995 war (Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska), which were then presented as the solution to it, today prove to be the problem. In voicing

and reclaiming their own underprivileged position within a state run by the ruling ethno-capitalists, social activists and citizens alike seem to detect the problem of their more than two decade-long subjugation more easily than ever. Aside from the elites and the small yet stable *salaried* (Standing, 2011) as the paid, permanently employed workforce of the ruling party, most BiH citizens live in precarity, with scarcity of jobs at home and a highly controlled work visa regime for those wishing to emigrate. This condition has opened up a space from where new political imaginaries and decolonial epistemic perspectives can be developed and put to practice.

The colonial matrix of power is not just about the control over state and economy but also over subjectivity, gender and sexuality. The potential of Yugoslav alternative socialist modernity after 1945 was reflected in women getting the right to vote, the right to education and to enter the world of paid labour (Majstorović, 2016). The mass literacy campaigns of the Antifascist Women's Front (Okić and Dugandžić, 2016) and the expansion of state schools and universities (Georgeoff, 1982) were some of the measures that contributed to the emancipation of socialist women. Following socialist industrialization in SFRY in which women were encouraged to enter the public realm and participate in political and economic decision-making, in postsocialism their roles became "hierarchically reorganised" (Burcar, 2014) and the reproductive work naturalized as solely women's. As was the case before WWII, the collusion of institutionalized religion and ruling elites in the new postsocialist era (power is evenly distributed between the clergy and ethno-capitalists) resulted in the retraditionalization of society. Misogyny, discrimination, exploitation and violence have become integral parts of the process of restoration of patriarchal capitalist relations and the pertaining peripheralization of women that ran contrary to the victories women had achieved during Yugoslav socialism (Majstorović, 2016)\*.

Stoler's (2016: 4-5) argument that we have to reexamine "what constitutes contemporary colonial relations, what counts as an imperial pursuit, and which geopolitics rest on residual or reactivated imperial practices" urges us to inquire into the relationship between the postcolonial and peripheral/marginal here. Much in the same vein, Boatcă (2012: 133) argues that a

\* We should keep in mind that patriarchal social relations persisted well during socialism (Petrović, 2018).

growing body of world-systems scholarship, historical as well as recent postcolonial and critical development studies “have revealed that the economic, political, and ideological domination that different parts of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe experienced at different times, beginning in the sixteenth century, followed a sequence that went from protocolonial to neocolonial at best despite the absence of formal colonization”.

Still, as Todorova reminds in a 2018 interview:

*[we] should be careful with the notions of the colonial and postcolonial [...] to hinge them to a broader universal theory. Granted, one can use decolonization as a metaphor and as a synonym for the struggle against subjugation and exploitation, but this leads us in the midst of a methodological conundrum where any form of subjugation and power hegemony can be termed colonial. (EuropeNow, 2018)*

However, unlike other ex-Yugoslav republics (perhaps with the exception of Kosovo), post-war BiH did have a fully operative neocolonial administration with political and bureaucratic governance from 1996 onwards, which between 2002 and 2011 appointed a High Representative who was also the European Union’s Special Representative to BiH (see Majstorović, 2007).

In the light of all this, I argue that BiH, as a former socialist country and one of the last European countries not admitted to the EU, simultaneously occupies a peripheral, marginal, and postcolonial position, even though Bosnian colonialism is a non-conventional, hybrid type with a spate of contradictions, including different racialization strategies\* and complex forms of exploitation. According to Quijano, the “axis of colonality... overdetermines the network of social relations that deal with control over labour, nature, gender and reproduction, subjectivity and knowledge, and authority with all their products and resources” (Quijano, 2000a: 344-45). Hence, it is important to analyse and map these networks within a specific geographic space. Moreover, such comparisons are useful as world-systems and postcolonial theory share “a critique of developmentalism, of Eurocentric

\* Despite being predominantly white, Bosnians and Herzegovinians are both racialized and racialize displaying what Balibar calls “racism without races” (2005), visible in chauvinistic and nationalist attitudes bordering with racism towards visible Others but also the urban/rural divide reflective of cultural racialization. For more on contemporary structures on Eastern European othering, see Kolodziejczyk and Sandru (2016).

forms of knowledge, of gender inequalities, of racial hierarchies, and of the cultural/ideological processes that foster the subordination of the periphery in the capitalist world-system” (Grosfoguel, 2008).

For those reasons, a decolonial approach that “dissolves the anti-capitalist postcolonial dichotomy in postsocialist studies by locating simultaneous origins of capitalism and coloniality” (Karkov and Valiavicharska, 2018:5) is a possible way out. This is especially true in the light of the struggles going on in this Balkan periphery that are not just meant as acts of restoration and nostalgia for the past (Boym, 2001) but are the acts of decolonial resistance of repressed social groups. These specificities and singularities open up room for “multiple, heterogeneous, and even conflictive pressures or logics” (Quijano, 2000b: 347 in Karkov and Valiavicharska, 2018: 5).

## **Conditions/constituents of peripherality in today’s Bosnia and Herzegovina**

As a part of the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empire and the poorest part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, until WWII BiH was mostly rural and agrarian. This was followed by fifty years of Yugoslav socialism, which ceased to exist in 1992 when chauvinistic nationalism, equipped with ammunition, reared its ugly head resulting in close to 100 000 war casualties (Tokača, 2012).\*

After the Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA) was signed in late 1995, the international community led by the Office of the High Representative (OHR) for BiH, created under the DPA to oversee the implementation of the DPA’s civilian aspects, began to intervene in the peacebuilding and statebuilding in BiH. The OHR quickly became the most powerful international body and final authority regarding the implementation of the DPA and the subsequent accession of BiH into the European Union (EU). Between 1998 and 2005, in a neocolonial manner, successive High Representatives “issued 757 decisions, removing 119 people from public office and imposing 286 laws or amendments to laws, with a gross lack of due process in exercising these powers” (Parrish, 2007: 15).

\* The estimated death toll is 95 940 of whom more than 38 239 were civilians (31107 Bosniaks, 4178 Serbs, 2484 Croats and 470 others).

Despite the diminished influence of the OHR since 2006, reflecting the change in the world's geopolitical influences, the country still formally has a neocolonial administration headed since 2009 by the Austrian diplomat Valentin Inzko. As the rest of former Yugoslavia, the most visible axis of oppression in BiH was not “classic” racism (see Baker, 2018), but ethnic nationalism coupled with neoliberalism as an oppressive strategy used to “other” different social groups (Majstorović and Turjačanin 2013). Although it formally ended the war, the Dayton Peace Agreement in fact legitimized ethnic nationalism by rendering it the only imaginable and authentic way of doing domestic politics. This state of affairs was completely unproblematic for the OHR's neocolonial administration as long as it served the goal of bringing market economy to BiH. Yet, while purporting to provide ethnic justice among the three divided BiH peoples in the post-war period, ethno-nationalists' rule became complicit in shady privatizations and irresponsible selling off of the country's natural riches such as forests, waters and energy (see Clancy, 2004). While holding a strong grip over the public sector and the distribution of jobs to a political clientele, the ethno-nationalist elite also contributed to a third wave of BiH immigrants leaving the country to become a new workforce in the EU.\*

The socio-economic origins of peripherality can be looked at from the position of a politico-economic restructuring and its three phases (Majstorović et al., 2015). The early political restructuring includes the neocolonial style Europeanization and democratization of the OHR-led international community between 1996-2006. The second phase is the one of the late political restructuring (2006-2014) marked by the rise of the new ethno-nationalist elites whose members privatized strategic companies and thus solidified themselves as the most enduring political elites. The third phase, involving the period after 2014, was marked by the protests and plenums against shady privatizations that have resulted in the burning of several cantonal government buildings. This phase has had its continuation on the main square of Banjo Luka, where the father of the brutally murdered David

\* The first wave of BiH gastarbeiters after WWII happened during the 1960s and 1970s, the second wave was a result of war-related migrations whereas the third wave started in 2013. Although there are no official statistics, some 300 000 people have left BiH since 2013, contributing to an already existing BiH diaspora of almost one million people (see Bougarel, 2018).



Dragičević – a student whose death the authorities refused to investigate – held a 300-day plena accusing the Republika Srpska entity (as part of the new Dayton state) for the mysterious death of his son (I explore this in more detail in the next section).

Imposed Europeanization, transition from socialism to market economy and supposed democratization have been previously analysed (see Majstorović, 2007). Here, it suffices to say that during the first ten years after Dayton, Europeanization in BiH conducted under the auspices of the OHR was discursively constructed as a change to normality presupposing an abnormal Bosnia. Joining the EU was often recontextualized as accession to NATO, as the guarantee of peace, security and stability for BiH. The EU was discursively constructed as the *locus amoenus*, an idyllic space of well-being and prosperity. The legitimization of the OHR's middleman position through a "stick and carrot" strategy best reflects the paradox of forced democratization in Bosnia, an experiment that did not yield much self-sufficiency and democracy in the country, but has strengthened the international community's liberal imperialism (Knaus and Martin, 2003). The highly interventionist approach detected in discourses and practices of the international community to post-war BiH as a response to a near-permanent state of emergency can be ascribed to a yet another "failed" Europeanization in which the conventional and free style conditionality, characteristic of EU enlargement, simply did not work (Aybet and Bieber, 2011).

In the background of the ethnic war of 1992-95 BiH also experienced significant economic changes losing the horizons of social property and self-management – two imperfect but real artefacts of Yugoslav socialism, all of which further peripheralized the country. The 1992-1995 war in BiH was an attempt at political as well as economic reorganization *par excellence*, as both ethnic difference and economic motives played a significant role in it. During the war, what had previously been defined as socially-owned was declared by various laws to be state-owned property or private capital – a practice of dispossession through which the political elites and warlords robbed Bosnian citizens (Majstorović et al., 2015). The new ethno-nationalist elites thus became the legal successors of the country they helped abolish. In postsocialism, the self-managed social property was passed into the hands of private individuals or political parties. The old socialist working

class has practically disappeared (Stenning, 2005) as “workers today are not only the few employed in industry, but also a huge number of unemployed, unpaid, and precarious workers in the service sector” (Škokić and Potkonjak, 2016: 129).

## **Resisting peripherality: workers, protesters, immigrants**

In terms of responses to post-war marginality/peripherality in which the greatest majority of workers became pauperized, the workers of the former Yugoslav giant detergent factory DITA from Tuzla provide an example of how such processes can not only be resisted but even subverted. In response to their management’s decision to privatize the factory, DITA workers attempted to reassert their interests by organizing strikes, holding watches, and using their bodies to protect the factory.

Studying workers’ protests in Tuzla (Majstorović and Vučković, forthcoming), we found that through successful self-organization workers have managed to have a say and prevent the “fritting away” of the factory by stopping its sell out on three different occasions. Subsequently, they have attempted to start the production with the little raw materials that they had but eventually came to the realization that the factory needed to be privatized, the only thing left to insist on was a “responsible owner”. Their goal was to continue working and producing and they were well aware that reclaiming the factory as owners (for different examples see Kojanić, 2018) would be close to impossible. Their ambiguity towards privatization thus remained a blind spot, blurring the relation between them, the new state and the private owner. In this indeterminacy their peripheral selves were torn between nostalgia for the socialist past (Kojanić, 2015) and a belief in the necessity of capitalist privatization and entrepreneurship (see Fudurić, 2007). This fight for survival between the presumed inevitability of privatization and the damage done by a series of private owners reveals a place of decolonial resistance in the absence of a restorable past.

Research on social movements and protests in post-Dayton BiH from 2012 to 2014 (Arsenijević, 2014; Majstorović et al., 2015; Kurtović, 2015; Mujanović,

2018; Riding, 2018) reveals the dynamic life of radical politics after socialism as newly appearing groups and movements in the region struggle to forge radically democratic visions of society. As attempts at deperipheralization and challenging exploitation, they have pivoted the struggles in the Balkans against social misery, deindustrialization, mass unemployment and living under a postdemocratic governance of repression. As Edin Hajdarpašić remarks:

*If someone had said in 1995 that the politicians of this small war-torn and impoverished country heavily scrutinized by the international community would go on to make themselves the proportionately highest paid representatives in Europe, to expropriate the country's key economic resources with impunity, to take out staggering loans for unrealized projects, and to block any attempts at changing this situation – all in less than 20 years after the General Framework Agreement for Peace – most experts would have dismissed such statements as 'unrealistic' and 'impossible'. Yet that is precisely what happened with the formation of new political forces after GFAP (Hajdarpašić in Arsenijević, 2015:105).*

Plenums and informal assemblies of citizens that emerged out of the February 2014 protests throughout BiH, as the most radical experiment in non-institutional politics since the collapse of Yugoslavia, were a meaningful grassroots change (albeit short-lived). They were motivated largely by the so-called “white bread allowances” for parliamentarians who were no longer performing their civil duties but were still getting paid while advancing the privatization of state industries. First, the Tuzla workers took to the streets. Soon, they were joined by students and other young people in the towns of Bihać, Gračanica, Zenica and the city of Sarajevo creating a unified front, at least in the early days, voicing their dissatisfaction with Bosnia's state and burning several cantonal buildings (see Arsenijević, 2014). Protesters stated they were “hungry in all three languages” and through acts of rebellion marked by significant “cross-entity” relations of cooperation bypassed Dayton-embedded ethnic divisions. They have paved the way for common citizenship and class solidarity, more social justice and redefinition of left politics in BiH – all of which can be interpreted as a decolonial struggle against the peripheral/marginal predicament.

With the 2018 *Pravda za Davida* (Justice for David) movement in the BiH entity of Republika Srpska (RS), issues such as police brutality, weak legal

system, public security and trust in the public institutions were voiced out as additional elements of distrust, especially in the eve and the aftermath of the October 2018 state elections. Following the movement on social networks and live streams from the Banja Luka's main square, nicknamed "David's square", revealed a scene of cathartic private mourning by family and friends which had gradually turned into a public democratic plenum of citizens. There, the popular dissent against the ruling party looked uninhibited and solidarity re-emerged as more and more people were coming to the square for the six o'clock protests, while others were bringing hot food and drinks to those gathered around David's father Davor Dragičević.\* In this case, the periphery strikes back – this movement and its leaders continue to speak truth to power in an unprecedented act of bravery. We cannot forget that the Republika Srpska, especially after the 2018 elections, is *de facto* becoming a one-party state. The active role of plena and bare-handed citizens' protests as "bodies that matter" in a "performative power of assembly" (Butler, 2015) may be a beginning of an active act of protests especially after the banning of public assemblies and the increasing police brutality since the end of 2018.\*\*

Another response to peripheralization that gained prominence since 2013 is migration – more and more BiH citizens are moving to the supposed "core" either through permanent or temporary arrangements or through applying and reapplying for work visas in the EU. Since 2013, BiH citizens have been quietly taking either "grey economy" jobs or more permanent employment arrangements mostly in Germany and Austria but also in other EU countries. Germany is the target country, for which the Sarajevo embassy approved 13 300 visa application only for the first nine months of 2017, and the number is estimated to have tripled since. Germany provides 24-hour care for some 1.86 million elderly for whom around 300 000 mostly female

\* The dead body of the 21-year-old David Dragičević was found in March 2018 in a ditch in Banja Luka. The refusal of the police to investigate the case as a murder started the protest movement *Pravda za Davida*, led by David's parents Davor and Suzana.

\*\* The situation became particularly grave after 30 December 2018 when Davor Dragičević went missing after having been on a search warrant under the assumption that he led a coup d'état and tried to violently change the RS constitution. After the official prohibition to gather on the public square or to walk the streets of Banja Luka, the remaining citizens kept assembling in front of the Temple of Christ the Survivor although the church doors remained closed.

Eastern Europeans already work (Lutz, 2015), young men get recruited too as the need is growing. These new socio-economic migrants comprise of mostly care, domestic and construction workers, as these are the most widely available entry-level jobs.

Migration is a strategy embraced by most people as they do not appear to view struggle and resistance as a viable means to reclaim a life and a social environment under acceptable conditions. These people seemingly escape the fate at home by taking precarious jobs abroad, thus reclaiming livelihoods they could not previously afford. Succumbing to the volatility of visa regimes, hard work and uncertain market conditions in Western European countries, they accept being marginalized but “under their own terms”, in the hope of creating better lives for their children – if not for themselves.

## **By way of conclusion**

Demonstrating a careful approach to the application of the terms “peripheral” and “peripherality”, Domanski and Lung (2009: 8) argued that two important fallacies have to be avoided in the debate on the periphery: a static view of the periphery, and the purposeful disregard of its relational character. First, there is no reason to believe in the stable status of the periphery; there are rather processes of creation, reproduction and/or breaking out from peripherality. Second, the periphery can only be understood in the context of its relationships to the core and other peripheries. Whereas contextual and historical preconditions are indispensable for determining the relationship between core and periphery, various trigger factors and other types of political influences that define the direction, nature and progress of this relationship also play a role.

*The position of the periphery is also not determined once and for all. The peripheral status of countries may be subject to change if they manage to achieve success in enhancing their position and change their relations to the core” (Domanski and Lung, 2009:9).*



There are several key, and occasionally overlapping, constitutive factors for peripherality in BiH today: repatriarchization, imposed Europeanization, privatization, and protests and migrations as the responses to it. These processes define how peripheral selves are formed at the margin of Europe with respect to ethnicity, class, and gender but also as disenfranchized, non-European others.

Danson and de Souza (2012: 4) highlight the need to see the periphery as more than just “the container for a specific group/kind of people” inhabiting it. They argue that the periphery is not just “the outcome of the centre’s development” but a “space with a past, present and future”, constantly in the process of becoming (Danson and de Souza, 2012). They write:

*There are some people among us that grow up, eat, go to school, make love, that live there. Periphery is created, experienced and continuously present. There is always something to be done about the periphery, whatever its appearances or circumstances, and this is also true – or maybe even more so – in an intellectual capacity (Danson and Souza, 2012: 4).*

BiH powerfully shows that the “periphery” is not a homogenous container where everyone is marginalized – with a closer look, we see a polarized society made of “the people” and ethno-nationalist elites. While these elites promise nationalist fantasies bordering with neofascism, patriarchy and religious conservatism, after more than twenty-year long largely incompetent and irresponsible rule, they have privatized, plundered and squandered the former social property, leaving the country impoverished and indebted. Unlike the 1990s and early 2000s when international interventionism in BiH was at its peak (Majstorović, 2007), today neither the OHR nor the EU seem too keen to intervene in BiH’s internal affairs. In the absence of the rule of law that can sanction the untrammelled power of local elites, the international community seems to acquiesce to the status quo.

Perhaps there is potential in this abandonment – without the international community, the simultaneously peripheral, marginal, and postcolonial selves on the margin of Europe have to deal with difficult

histories, contest ethnic capitalism, and carve out a space for a dynamic emancipatory politics that will decolonize this space by creating more social justice, less misery, and better lives for all. “Nothing will be named after you”<sup>\*</sup> Sarajevo and Tuzla protesters were shouting in February 2014 to their politicians just as Davor Dragičević rose from a wailing father to a political activist who bravely and loudly continues to repeat on the main square in Banja Luka that “the RS is a criminal state and the RS police a narco-cartel killing children and youth.” Drawing either on the antifascism of ZAVNOBiH or perhaps forging new legacies in battles to come, the transgenerational questions remain of when and who will get the job done.

*Bibliography* ➤

<sup>\*</sup> “Po vama se ništa neće zvati” is an allusion to the line of the famous Bijelo Dugme song “Pristao sam biću sve što hoće”.







**STAND UP TO RACISM**

**Say no to  
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here to stay**

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antisemitism**

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welcome**



# Uneasy solidarities?

Migrant encounters between  
postsocialism and postcolonialism

Špela Drnovšek Zorko



*Image Description:*  
Protest sign from March  
Against Racism, London 2017.

*Source:* Tim Dennell,  
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I am neither a postsocialist scholar nor a postcolonial theorist, nor do I – perhaps most pertinently, and puzzlingly – conduct any research in Central East Europe. As an anthropologist of postsocialist memory whose ethnographic work has unfolded in Britain, however, I have found “dialoguing between the posts” to be primarily about the question of encounter. It is about many different encounters: encounters between migrants, encounters between struggles, and encounters between the experiences and histories of people from seemingly disconnected parts of the world. Yet they are encounters that do not preclude difficult conversations.

In a 2009 interview, Walter D. Mignolo proposed that:

*...the decolonial future of Europe and America is in immigration. People move, they come to different places with a colonial wound. And then there are those who were born in the empire or on its margins. They will realize that they have to join forces with other migrants and listen to their own voices instead of claiming their Europe-ness.\**

In a somewhat similar vein, several years before the “Balkan route” became a keyword of the European refugee crisis, Stef Jansen (2012) imagined a future in which Bosnia and Serbia have joined the EU. He wondered whether the memory of Bosnians’ and Serbs’ enforced immobility after the loss of the Yugoslav passport might one day provoke empathy with other border-crossers: “As rows of *other* people, seeking to travel to Europe, are being treated as ‘idiots’ in the queues under the EU flags in front of some BiH or Serbian embassy, will anyone be able to turn the memory of their own humiliation into a source of solidarity?”

These are good questions, and optimistic prophecies. Does migration to postcolonial Western Europe – and its border regimes – present an opportunity for decolonial politics that unites the postcolonial and postsocialist worlds in solidarity from the peripheries? Perhaps. But seeking such a dialogue requires us, to borrow from US labour historian David Roediger (2017), to “make solidarity uneasy” – to recognize how overlapping structures of domination leave different imprints on

\* Walter D. Mignolo and Madina Tlostanova, [interview](#).

the differently positioned, without giving up hope for connection and meaningful entanglement.

This article is born from my reflections on these intersections as they have emerged in my ethnographic research, as well as during my time spent in British higher education. It presents a necessarily partial, necessarily open-ended view. Drawing on data collected for my PhD and arguments developed for a recent academic article (Drnovšek Zorko, 2018), I first explore the ambivalent relationship between post-Yugoslav migrants and British hierarchies of belonging, which reveals the extent to which solidarity is shot through with a distinctly colonial Eurocentrism. I then turn to the kinds of dialogues and intersections I am currently seeking in my postdoctoral research, which explores Central East Europeans' encounters with race and coloniality in post-Brexit Britain. I end on a coda about my personal encounters with decoloniality in the context of the university – many of which were rooted in and routed through the study of diaspora, and which continue to underpin my warily hopeful attachments to “uneasy solidarity”.

## **Race and colonialism in the dialogue between the “posts”**

Numerous inches of academic journals and not a few books have been dedicated to probing the vexed question of the comparisons – nay, the analogies – nay, the intellectual resonances – that emerge when we put postsocialism and postcolonialism into the same picture. In one vein, we see a firmly-established tradition of drawing on postcolonial theory to analyse the representational hierarchies that still maintain Eastern Europe in a position of civilizational inferiority, particularly in the work of scholars such as Maria Todorova (1997), Vesna Goldsworthy (1998), Nataša Kovačević (2008), or in Milica Bakić-Hayden's (1995) metaphor of “nesting Orientalisms”. In a slightly different vein, the analogy would seem to be more direct, with scholars seeking the inclusion of regions ruled by the Russian, Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires and the USSR in the analytical scope of mainstream postcolonial studies. Here there appears to be some frustration over the one-way traffic in ideas: Dorota Kołodziejczyk and Cristina Șandru (2012)

note that while postcolonial theory has reverberated widely in the scholarship on postsocialist Europe, “in the postcolonial scholarly arena per se, the intersections between these two paradigms continue to be of marginal significance”, suggesting that postcolonial theory has largely failed to recognize the imperial character of state communist regimes. Yet comparisons between Western European colonialism and Eastern European state socialism are complicated by the latter’s historical record of anti-imperial solidarity, which, while contradictory, as well as contingent, disrupts the drawing of a straight line between the two systems (Karkov and Valiavicharska, 2018).

As Neil Lazarus (2012) points out, one must always ask what such comparisons are intended to achieve. Lazarus identifies two key stumbling blocks preventing the postsocialist experience from becoming as popular a reference point among postcolonialists as has been the reverse: the first being postcolonial theorists’ attachment to the “Third World” and the exceptionalism of the colonies that shaped it, and the second being a widespread suspicion of Marxist thought among many postsocialist scholars, which prevents them from engaging with the anti-capitalist thought that forms a significant part of postcolonial critique. While the degree to which this holds true could be debated (some scholars of postsocialism are indeed



A poster in Ljubljana, which displays images of animals and plants alongside a photo of a black child, reads: ‘Biodiversity is the diversity of all living things’; November 2018; Source: Špela Drnovšek Zorko, Licence: CC BY-NC 4.0.

hostile to Marxism, as are indeed some decolonial theorists – but by no means all), his intervention highlights some of the difficulties of entering into truly mutually transformative dialogue, as well as the extent to which some scholars from the European postsocialist region have felt marginalized or ignored by the global academic marketplace.

Sharad Chari and Katherine Verdery's (2009) influential article on "thinking between the posts" – whose call to abandon the pretence that postcolonial and postsocialist subjects have ever occupied discrete worlds has been widely responded in recent scholarship – proposed several avenues for putting the two paradigms into productive conversation. One of Chari and Verdery's suggestions is for scholars to refine their understanding of "state-sanctioned racisms" beyond "colour, physiognomy, creed, or blood" (2009). The comparisons might be particularly fruitful, they note, for students of communist regimes' productions of internal enemies, as it "reveals processes that Marxist orthodoxy passed over but that come into view with a postcolonial lens focused on racialized biopower" (2009: 26). Indeed, Dušan Bjelić's (2018) recent work engages with how class and ethnicity have in the Balkans been variously mobilized in the form of "race". And yet – matters of "color, physiognomy, creed, or blood" are not absent from the postsocialist world, nor have they ever been. As Catherine Baker (2018) has shown in her recent book *Race and the Yugoslav Region*, and as other scholars have done for other parts of Central East Europe, the region as a whole was never immune from the same racial logic that is often deemed to plague Western European colonizing powers or their former overseas territories. Ideologies and practices of exclusion that predated or survived the reign of communist regimes, including histories of anti-Semitism, anti-Roma xenophobia, and Islamophobia, enter into and hybridize with the conceptions of race routed through those other colonizing geographies. These conceptions have been circulating for centuries: they are firmly embedded, frequently unexamined, in Central East European imaginaries, as I was forcefully reminded on a recent trip to Slovenia, where a poster campaign promoting "biodiversity" implicitly relegated a black child to the status of flora and fauna.

Since Europeanness is itself steeped in racialized hierarchies of belonging that are fundamentally colonial (El-Tageb, 2011), aspirational identifications with Europe on the part of its peripheries frequently become a matter of

excluding or dominating the non-European. As Dace Dzenovska (2013) has demonstrated in the case of Latvia, colonial aspirations can be deployed to establish one's right to a place at the European table. She writes about attempts to incorporate the colonizing ventures of the 17th century Duchy of Courland – which briefly owned colonial outposts in West Africa – into Latvia's national history, thus revealing the double-sidedness of coloniality: “on the one hand”, she writes, “postsocialist Eastern Europeans facilitate the erasure of coloniality from Western Europe's self-narrative by becoming objects of democratization projects” – such as those claiming to promote liberal and democratic values in postsocialist European countries (2013: 411). “On the other hand”, continues Dzenovska, “postsocialist Eastern Europeans throw that project into disarray when in order to overcome their seemingly permanent ‘not-quite-European’ position they strive to identify with colonialism” (2013: 411).

## **Post-Yugoslav emplacements**

Within my own research, the postsocialist articulations of relative “world-ness” – the matter of who “we” were, and who we are today – are intimately joined to the particularity of the postcolonial British milieu. This allows me to explore how race and coloniality affect the way that migrants from the Central East European region relate to a purportedly multicultural, if increasingly isolationist, society. Rather than positing the two “posts” as distinct historical and cultural entities, I am interested in how people perceive their encounters with difference as encounters with difference, mediated by specific points of origin, collective histories, and the cultural archives (Wekker, 2016) that migrants necessarily bring with them. In my current research project on what I am calling “diasporic postsocialism”, this means tracing the lived experiences of contemporary encounters across geographical, cultural, and racialized difference as migrants seek to emplace themselves within a (post-)imperial nation – Britain – still and perhaps increasingly convulsed by what the cultural theorist Paul Gilroy (2004) terms “postcolonial melancholia” (Britain is, of course, just as much a postcolonial space as the nations it once ruled). Specifically, what does



it mean to be a Central East European migrant – a postsocialist migrant, if you will – in contemporary Britain, encountering, not only in London but in many urban centres, migrants and citizens who trace their descent to former European overseas colonies? What can “diasporic postsocialism” say about the dynamics of migrant politics in a postcolonial metropole?

But my research is also fundamentally about historical entanglements: the need to understand such contemporary encounters against the backdrop of already-there historical interactions between the Second and the Third World during the Cold War, in political alliances such as the Non-Aligned Movement or in often-fraught “friendships” embedded in **cultural exchanges**. On one level, this simply means challenging perceptions of Britain as the only possible place for people from particular world peripheries – the “post” worlds – to encounter each other, and to encounter each other’s histories. On another level, tracing such historical entanglements also means recognizing that postsocialist European migrants’ perceptions of their place in the world are deeply affected by the racialized legacies of colonial and imperial projects that define the conditions for Europeanness itself.

Based on fieldwork conducted between 2013 and 2015 among families and migrant community organisations from the Yugoslav region, largely in London but also in several other locations in England, my PhD research explored the conceptual terrain that my interlocutors traversed when constituting intergenerational knowledge about the past. In particular, I explored the ways in which stories of socialist Yugoslavia become especially pertinent when my interlocutors – who were primarily but certainly not exclusively Bosnian Muslims, sought to establish a sense of coevalness and equality between themselves as migrants and the rest of British society, or between themselves and their children who were born or raised in Britain.

The comparably small numbers of Bosnians, Croatians, Serbs, and other migrants from former Yugoslavia has proved both a blessing and a curse when it comes to establishing a collective narrative. On the one hand, their invisibility in the larger British discourse about migrants as bearers of dangerous cultural difference means relative safety from the worst of the stigmatization that befalls some communities, particularly black or brown Muslims (Bosnians’ whiteness plays a significant role in their failure to be read as Muslim – that is, dangerous – in the same way). On the other hand,

the lack of recognition this implies gives rise to frustrations at being lumped into undifferentiated, if relatively privileged, categories of foreignness. The following is an excerpt from a conversation I had with three women from Bosnia, all of whom came to England as teenagers (all names used in the article are pseudonyms):

*Asja: I used to get that a lot: are you Polish, are you Polish. A lot. No, I'm not Polish!*

*Fata: I used to get South African.*

*Me: South African!*

*Asja: Before they said Spanish, because we had few Polish people, but recently they started [saying] Polish, Polish.*

*Me: For a lot of people here there's no difference... Eastern European, one flavour.*

*Fata: Just one big lump.*

While the consistent misrecognition of Asja's and Fata's origins might be a case of the changing same, the evolution from "Spanish" to "Polish" also represents a fundamental shift in British imaginaries of white foreignness following the 2004 EU expansion, which led to increased numbers of migrants from formerly socialist Europe, especially Poland. The resulting racialization of these migrants (Fox, Moroşanu, and Szilassy, 2012) has seen "East Europeans" transformed into a homogenous collective subject that inhabits an ambivalent form of whiteness.

Much less attention has been paid to the legacies of Cold War divisions into the First and Second World, which some of my interlocutors saw as central to the welcome they encountered upon first arriving in the United Kingdom. In an interview with a man I will call Asim, he recounted his memories of the reception that Bosnian refugees received in Britain in the mid-1990s:

*The Cold War made it so that people in Eastern Europe are somehow seen as some other kind of people [neki drugi ljudi]. Something shocked me when we came here, and when the refugees came. They taught Bosnians how to use a toilet. 'That's where the water flows', and so on. So people [Bosnians] were thinking 'what, are you normal, what's wrong with you?'*

The discursive association between “Bosnian” and “backward” has another aspect in the continued interest among undergraduate, postgraduate, and PhD students in researching suffering Bosnians. According to a friend who volunteers at a supplementary school for Bosnian children in London, where parents bring their young on the weekend so they can hone their language skills and learn to name all the rivers in Bosnia, the organisation receives near-monthly requests for interviews. “Bosnia is very popular, it would seem”, my friend said diplomatically – but added that she mostly feels she can’t ask the parents if they’d like to take part, not when so many of the research projects are about trauma, genocide, or war rape.

Such misrecognition is not limited to Bosnians. Several Serbs I spoke with were still occasionally wary of proclaiming their origins when speaking to British people, remembering the automatic association between “Serbian” and “war criminal” that reigned in the 1990s. They perhaps need worry no longer: a young third-generation British-Serbian woman told me that when she told her high school friends she was visiting Serbia, most thought she had said Siberia.

Some of my Yugoslav interlocutors’ responses, however, were deeply intertwined with the questions of race and coloniality. This was most clearly seen in the persistence of an insidiously white Europeanness that haunts their claims to recognition in the face of perceived misrecognition – particularly when demonstrating the ability to participate appropriately in a diverse, multiculturalist society, which remains a significant element of Britain’s self-perceptions even in the wake of a resurgent isolationism and white nativism. A man called Samir explained to me with satisfaction that the Bosnian community had been fully accepted as multicultural citizens by a local English council:

*[A member] of the City Council says: ‘Samir, you’re the best group.’ No: ‘the best-organized group that has come here’. It’s logical that we are. Because we come from Europe. Those others come either from Asia or from down in Africa somewhere. But we come from Europe. We know the system of organization, we were an organized country.*

On another occasion Samir spoke to me of the dissolution of Yugoslavia as a result of political machinations, emphasizing that this could not be ascribed to ethnic differences – after all, “we never had tribes like they have

in Africa”. While Samir’s antipathy to the “ancient ethnic hatreds” thesis that permeated Western media and academia in the wake of Yugoslavia’s downfall is fully understandable, his recourse was to lump the entire continents of Asia and Africa into a less rational imagined geography in order to demonstrate Bosnians’ Europeanness, and therefore, rationality. It is difficult to imagine a more apt example of the ways in which race and coloniality inform postsocialist – in this case, post-Yugoslav – claims to being worthy residents of British society.

And yet, in other contexts, Samir was surprisingly critical of Britain’s chequered colonial past. Once we were rehashing the matter of British people who had viewed Bosnian refugees as backward:

“They looked at us like people who came out of the jungle, like we had no clue about anything”, he commented.

I asked how he thought this compared with the way migrant communities from Africa or Asia were perceived.

“Probably the same. Probably the same”.

“I think Britons often forget about their history of colonialism and imperialism”, I offered.

*This colonialism, imperialism and that”, said Samir, “that’s something which.. It led to the fact that they ruled over so many nations. In all honesty, they crossed the line, it was simply exploitation. Of resources. And then at one point, when this couldn’t go on any longer, when it was all over, they mentally remained in the same system. Mentally. It’s the way they feel.*

In Samir’s denunciation of British colonialism, a dialogue between post-socialism and postcolonialism allows for the translation of some concepts – Marxist anti-imperialism, for instance – but not others. While exposing British hypocrisy in its treatment of the people it had once colonized allows Samir to rhetorically ally Bosnian migrants with African and Asian migrants, he is somewhat less alert to the centuries-long reverberations of the colonial project that shape not only British attitudes toward civilizational hierarchies but his own imagined cartography – in part, perhaps, because Yugoslav anti-imperialism never explicitly confronted its own place within global hierarchies stratified by race (Subotić & Vučetić, 2017).

In my PhD research, references to Britain's imperial past in connection with Yugoslavia emerged in a multitude of ways, which did not necessarily reflect the same political standpoint. I once asked Vera, a middle-aged Serbian woman who had lived in London for over twenty years, if she had noticed a rise in anti-migration rhetoric in the British media. Vera nodded firmly and launched into a short monologue. Britain, she told me, occupies countries – like it did 'Yugoslavia' in the 1990s – so that their people have to leave and then they come here because they have connections, like her family did. But people only come because Britain meddles abroad, and then *they* wonder why everyone comes here. Just look at the Indians here, that's what happened to them as well. "Yes", I said, "Britain was an empire, and then..." Vera jumped in: "Exactly! An empire".

While it was my helping nudge that elicited the word in this case, the term "empire" emerged organically in a conversation I had with Jasmina over a London lunch. Jasmina commented that she finds it fascinating the way the British and the Americans represent the Second World War differently, and who gets to be the victor in each narrative. She also finds it amazing, she added, that the British have never really owned up to their history of imperialism, at least not in terms of public culture or even the school curriculum: "So many of them don't even know what went on", she concluded.

When I saw her again in the autumn of 2015, the media was saturated with images and stories of the refugee crisis. Talking about European and British responses to the crisis, Jasmina shook her head and told me that she feels increasingly proud to have been raised in Yugoslavia: to come from a country that stood for "just values", to have been educated in the values of the struggle against fascism and the solidarity of non-alignment. Yugoslavia helped other countries shake off colonialism – did I know that? She didn't think that this memory should be forgotten. The intersections brought to light by these conversations with two women with very different national, religious, and political affiliations can bring into view some of the cross-cutting narratives that underlie postsocialist alliances not only with fellow white Europeans, but also with so-called postcolonial migrants.



## Post-Brexit solidarities?

These conversations also inspired my current postdoctoral project, which explores the intersections between postsocialism and postcolonialism through the experiences of Central East European migrants in Britain.



In an interactive art installation from the *Trigger Warning* project by *There There*, staged in Wolverton in 2018, two boxes labelled 'Leave in the UK' and 'Remain in the UK' allow participants to fish for 'fact checked prophecies'; Source: Špela Drnovšek Zorko, Licence: CC BY-NC 4.0.

Thinking through the ambivalences in how post-Yugoslav migrants located themselves within British narratives made me wonder what other histories and cultural archives might be relevant when studying migrant lives in the present moment. Is it possible to conduct an ethnography of the imaginaries of race in post-Brexit Britain from the point of view of postsocialist migrants from the broader Central East European region? The seams where the “Second World” meets coloniality might become clearer with reference to Brexit: not (only) because it is presently nigh impossible to write anything about the United Kingdom without mentioning the B-word, but because the responses and discussions it has set in motion are in many ways illustrative of longer trends.

For one thing, Brexit has revealed the many joints where (South) Eastern Europe meets migration meets “race”. Many East European migrants in Britain faced discrimination and abuse even before the referendum (Rzepnikowska, 2019), all while being confronted by the latest tabloid headlines on job-stealing Polish plumbers and criminal Romanian beggars. In 2014, UKIP leader Nigel Farage, asked in a radio interview to explain the difference between living next to a Romanian and a German family, responded “you know what the difference is”. In the run-up to the referendum, the pro-Brexit campaigns gleefully fanned popular anxieties about migration, epitomized by Farage’s infamous Breaking Point poster, which used an image of refugees crossing the Croatia-Slovenia border to depict the unfettered threat that free movement poses to Britain. (It is worth noting that the government then helmed by David Cameron, the official voice of Remain, had vigorously fanned and appeased those very same anxieties for years.) In her analysis of referendum campaign materials, Alexandra Bulat (2017) found numerous references to “future Europe” migrants who were prophesied to pour into Britain in the near future, including from Turkey, Serbia, and Macedonia – much as their imminent right to free movement may come as a surprise to the citizens of these countries. When the Polish Social and Cultural Association in West London was defaced with graffiti several days after the referendum, the consensus of both police and most mainstream media was that this had been “racially motivated”. As Brexit introduced a new category of migrant to the popular imagination – “EU migrants”, that is, EU citizens

who had been in the privileged position of not previously noticing they were migrants – it became clear not only that East was still less desirable than West, but that Central East Europeans still struck many people as white-but-not-quite (Roediger, 2005).

On the other hand, the rise in reported hate crime (Devine, 2018) after the referendum affected not only the “New Europeans”, but everyone deemed to embody the foreigners that the British people had purportedly voted to expel, including British citizens from minority communities. Unfortunately, we cannot count on any automatic affinity or solidarity on the part of Central East Europeans toward those who have long experienced the white nativism of British national identity: research has highlighted a tendency amongst Central East Europeans to claim whiteness as a defence against discrimination (Fox, Moroşanu and Szilassy, 2015). At the same time, while black and ethnic minority voters for the most part backed Remain, many did vote Leave – citing, among other motivations, the ease with which EU citizens could settle in the United Kingdom compared with people from other parts of the world, including Commonwealth countries, who are currently subject to stringent immigration rules.

While the subject of Brexit and migration has doubtlessly launched a thousand research projects since the vote to Leave, my own interests emerged more directly from the themes that surprised me in my PhD project: primarily the many angles from which postsocialist Europeans could relate their own experiences to the question of Britain as a postcolonial space. As my previous anecdotes above have indicated, these articulations – or dialogues – with race and (post-)coloniality might draw on unexpected historical phenomena to explain the present; they might be as much about identifying with exclusionary Europeanness as about recovering the memory of anti-colonial solidarity. The question I am taking into my current research conversations is whether the historical and contemporary archive connecting postsocialist subjects with race and coloniality, which is so readily apparent in the anti-migrant hostility gripping the British Isles, can yield possible solidarities, as well as frictions.

## Learning decoloniality

What is the place of decoloniality in this picture? Unlike postcolonial theory, which I devoured like the bright-eyed, politically righteous undergraduate I imagined myself to be, I admit that I am decidedly under-read in the theoretical canon of decolonial theory. In fact, my first meaningful encounter with decoloniality was during my time at SOAS – formerly the School of African and Asian Studies – where I did my PhD, in its form as an activist rather than theoretical project. Renowned for its student activism\* as much as its regional specialisms, SOAS would seem an apt place to encounter demands to decolonize the curriculum, or long-standing student societies campaigning against immigration detention. At the same time, SOAS had started out as a training college for colonial officials, with its library still home to important missionary archives – and that legacy remains, too. As the university leadership gradually subsumed the energies of the decolonizing campaign into a bureaucratic “vision”\*\* – while failing to meaningfully address the student achievement gap, the overrepresentation of women and black and ethnic minority staff on casual contracts, or decolonizing pedagogy – and as some of my students’ hopes for an institution of higher education where they could be free of everyday white supremacy proved doomed to disappointment, the decolonizing project revealed itself to be as messy and open to co-optation as it was clearly necessary.

Yet where I perhaps learned most about decolonizing was from my PhD supervisor, Parvathi Raman, who saw teaching as an essential site of activism. Her course on migration and diaspora studies was where I truly grasped that my nascent undergraduate postcolonialism had been missing a keen understanding of colonialism and anti-colonialism. The “diaspora” she taught me was the “diaspora” of Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, and Avtar Brah; cultural theorists who grounded their critique of British nativism in their own experience, and the experience of others not exactly, but somehow, like them. It was the “diaspora” born out of the slave trade and indentured labour migration, and the “diaspora” of the radical creativity required of

\* more on this link

\*\* more on this link

those who have been forcefully displaced not only from their homes but from their frames of reference. Yet it was also the “diaspora” of nationalist movements and conservative calls to homeland: the inevitable antidote to over-romanticising the political potential of hybrid identities. If my time at SOAS reminded me that “we” can be both radical and reactionary, it also taught me that seeking out those historical migrations, circulations, and exchanges that defy the image of a neatly bounded culture is a project worth pursuing, even when some imagined geographies might seem to be distinctly self-contained.

We should not underestimate this decolonial potential of diaspora – in its more expansive, connecting sense that can unsettle the collective subject in postsocialist as much as postcolonial Europe. In my interview with Asja, Fata, and Belma, the three Bosnians who had lived in Britain since their late teens, the conversation turned to certain changes they now see occurring in Bosnia:

*Asja: Someone was telling me a story, Bosnians in Sarajevo, and they actually saw two black people and they spoke Bosnian. They said, “I was shocked”! Before we never saw, obviously, but now there is more.*

*Belma: When I was on a beach last year, we saw a little girl, I think her mother is Bosnian, dad probably from Jamaica, she speaks Bosnian, and my little nephew told me, “auntie, look! Crna curica, a black girl!” He was amazed, you know...*

*Me: But because she spoke Bosnian.*

*Belma: Because she is black.*

It is of course the conjunction of “black” and “speaking Bosnian” that evinced such astonishment. In Belma’s speculative description of the little girl on the beach – “I think her mother is Bosnian, dad probably from Jamaica” – the little girl stands for a changing vision of Bosnia made possible by diasporic inscriptions. Even if Bosnia is largely understood to be fundamentally, even monolithically white, these scenes from the beach and the coffee shop offer proof that it might not stay that way forever. If there is a decolonial politics in the way we think about migration, it lies also in acknowledging these changes and incorporating them into the way we speak of collective postsocialist subjects.



There are, I know, those who are currently conducting much-needed research on, or are themselves experiencing, the entanglement of the “posts” in Central East Europe through migration, at border fences or in the difficult intimacies of daily lives in predominantly white cities, towns, and villages. There also those who are actively trying to connect across struggles, histories, and positionalities. My view from a (small, and possibly-disintegrating) postimperial island places such encounters in a very different frame, yet represents a slice of the same dialogue unfolding in postsocialist Europe. The work of deconstructing postsocialist subjectivity so that it acknowledges its colonizing and colonized position – as well as its anti-colonial legacy – does not preclude a reconstruction aimed at interrupting hegemonic white Europeanness, a project that finds urgent echoes in the post-Brexit landscape. As my ethnographic anecdotes reveal, “the migrant” is not always right, or always right-on; in most cases solidarity is not only uneasy, but has yet to coalesce. Yet the everyday humdrum of struggles has the potential to force an unexpected awareness and recognition of what “we” have in common, as well as where our experiences and positionalities diverge – and forge alliances that decentre, or could decentre, the unbearable lightness of Western European coloniality.

*Bibliography* ➤

# EX-YUGOSLAVIA

from 1990s to 2009  
The role of Europe

turbo-fascistic process  
towards  
contemporary  
neoliberal capitalism...



production of de-politicized subjects

## TURBO REALISM

alienation as value  
de-humanization



Achille Mbembe

from biocapitalism to necrocapitalism  
from biopolitics to necropolitics

Giorgio Agamben  
'bare life'

Santiago Lopez Petit

democracy as the re-articulation of the  
war-State

and  
post modern fascism

- it sterilizes the "Other"
- it evacuates conflict  
from public space
- it neutralizes the political

Nationalism as a model of depoliticization

culturalization

Repetition

- contemporary art today
- reality covered with "obviousness"
- the language of how the content is  
normalised and disappeared
- performative politics

Regulation of Memory

Memory is not a matter of sentimentalism and heroism  
History is already a product of hegemonic narratives

evacuated

a neutral space where memory is

Europe  
a construction  
without memory

as material foundations and  
as "non-material" discourses

capital  
financialization of  
(cultural)  
institutions

financialization of

# Theorizing decoloniality in Southeastern Europe: Vocabularies, politics, perspectives

**Marina Gržinić**

*Image Description:*

Seizure. Rewriting Counter-Histories (2015), Marina Gržinić and  
Aina Šmid. **Source:** Marina Gržinić;

**T**he joints and fissures between postsocialist and post-/decolonial perspectives are of key importance today.\* Exploring these in search of new openings and potential is necessary as the changes and deregulations brought by neoliberal global capitalism make us aware of the reconceptualizations of the notions of socialism, capitalism, postsocialism, postcoloniality and decoloniality – concepts that are not (only) rhetorical figures but denote concrete historical processes. I pose the question: What is the relevance of post-/decolonial and postsocialist approaches for the study of power, hierarchy and resistance in Southeast Europe? What are the decisive innovations of decolonial strategies in an Eastern European space that is already transformed into territories as Southeast Europe, Western Balkans etc., vis-à-vis other approaches in this context?

On the one hand, it is obvious that the relation between socialism and capitalism implicates the understanding of the mode of reproduction and relations of exploitation through an analysis of labour, (state-) capital and property, as well as conditions of reproduction that include the whole strata of institutional, legal and political readings of power and dispossession. On the other hand, if we want to proceed with theories of the postcolonial, postsocialist and decolonial in both Eastern Europe and Europe, we have to analyze how decolonial thought develops, individually, with each of its authors, and how it is configured in specific geopolitical spaces.

Lastly, we talk about Eastern Europe, though paradoxically what is lurking here as even more demanding is the relation between the postcolonial and decolonial. I proceed by placing the dialogue between postsocialist and post-/decolonial approaches in its wider context, to then formulate my thesis about the potential of this dialogue and spell out its significance in regard to the four key relations defining the synthesis between post-/decolonial and postsocialist inquiry in the remainder of the article, namely those between capitalism and socialism; the postcolonial and the postsocialist; the decolonial and the postsocialist; and the decolonial and the postcolonial.

\* For the final editing of this text I am indebted to the editors of this special issue Philipp Lottholz, Polina Manolova and Katarina Kušić. The text benefits from commentaries of many, nevertheless I want to name Šefik Tatlić (Bihać, BiH), Tjaša Kancler (Barcelona/Maribor (Slovenia) and Borut Mauhler (Ljubljana); for decades we have engaged in merciless debates and productive work.



## Dialoguing

The idea of “dialoguing” between postsocialist and post-/decolonial perspectives is conceptually linked to a conference that took place in April 2015 under the title *Postcolonial and Postsocialist Dialogues: Intersections, Opacities, Challenges in Feminist Theorizing and Practice*,\* at Linköping University (Sweden). There, it became clear that although “postcolonial theory has already evolved into a sophisticated theoretical apparatus for the investigation of the power imbalance between the West and the rest”, it missed to take on board postsocialist perspectives and was still insufficient in the range of perspectives and depth of analysis it provided. The conference exposed three pertinent lines of thinking.\*\*

First, one of the most tangible shortcomings of the postcolonial and postsocialist approaches, exposed by Grada Kilomba, is that they have been inattentive to the role of race and colour in the processes of ordering and domination in the region. Kilomba likened this colour-blindness to that of “dominant Western feminism”, which, according to her “has [also] failed to address ‘race’ and racism as integral parts of feminist discourse, relegating the reality of Black women/Trans/Queers and those of colour to invisibility”.

Second, Tanel Rander proposed the periodization of Eastern European subjectivity as a body and relict/object of geopolitics. The proposed periodization starts with the concept of “a piece of shit” that I developed in order to define Eastern Europeans’ subjectivities in the 1990s in my book *Fiction Reconstructed* (2000: 16–21). I compared Eastern Europe (after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989) with a disgusting and indivisible remainder of a cyber/virtual identity. “A piece of shit” was put forward as a metaphor for postsocialist transformation that was mainly based on its unconditional linking with global capital and control. To this conceptualization, Rander added a further step, making reference to Ovidiu Țichindeleanu’s question “What is Eastern Europe now?” and the direct answer: “Nothing!” Rander went on and added to these two historical elaborations another process of the transformation of Europe. Based on mine and Šefik Tatlić’s observation

\* See the information presently available [here](#)

\*\* The following references are taken from the collection of abstracts from the conference website, accessed in 2017 and currently unavailable



of a shift from biopolitics to necropolitics that can be identified as Europe's newest condition (Gržinić and Tatlić, 2014), Rander exposed that Eastern Europe returns in the new millennium as a geopolitical relict, and an object of necropolitics. Moreover, Rander states that through articulating the links between geo-politics and body-politics we open up the possibility of decolonizing areas of postcolonialism and postsocialism that are today under (quasi-)colonial control.

Finally, the conference in 2015 exposed the question of how white people identify with black struggle inside the regime of whiteness. Or, to put it differently, while not aiming to create a rhetorical binary, to ask, via the conference agenda, "How does Black Europe identify with Eastern Europe's White 'decolonial' strategies?". In her proposal entitled *Unequal and Gendered Access: Citizenship Rights in the Longue Durée*, Manuela Boatcă captured the exclusion at the heart of this regime of whiteness most poignantly, claiming that an "institution of citizenship has developed in the West through legal (and physical) exclusion of non-European, non-White and non-Western populations from civic, political, social and cultural rights, all of which were additionally filtered through a gendered lens"; and next, that "citizenship and gender are the most decisive factors accounting for extreme inequalities between individuals in rich and poor countries in the 21st century". Based on these conceptual and empirical entry points that emerged at the 2015 conference, I put forward my thesis on the paramount relevance and importance of decoloniality in Southeast Europe and beyond.

## Thesis

My thesis is that a pertinent decolonial turn deploys the constitutive linkages between colonialism, colonality, capital, power, biopolitics and necropolitics, racism and other forms of dehumanization including exploitation, extractions, and dispossessions, on one side, and, on the other, positions of subjectivities, agencies, and empowerment. Today, racism and the contemporary forms of necrocapitalism and dispossession produce modes of life that are despoiling entire populations of humanity, dying from hunger in thousands, evicted from their homes in millions, secluded and brutalized. However, these experiences

also open possibilities for an inter-linking of decolonial transmigrant and transfeminist conceptualizations of history, life, and agency as suggested by Samir Amin in 1990. He claimed that it is through the identification of such interconnections that we can delink from the deep contradictions and antagonisms between the economic, social, cultural, and political norms and forms of global necrocapitalism (Amin, 1990).

Where do I stand in this analysis? It is vital to state that the decolonial perspective, or turn, or horizon, brought three key lines back into the purview of analysis. These are racialization, the colonial matrix of power, and the hyper-violent regime of whiteness. These three lines are foundational for neoliberal global necrocapitalism that entered the world stage on September 11, 2001 with all its subforms of violent disfiguration of humanity: financialization, turbo- and postmodern fascism, scientific racism, etc. In my earlier work,\* I entangled these three lines with necropower and necropolitics in order to think of a historical mode of capitalist reproduction that appeared as a genocidal turbo fascist regime in the 1990s in former Yugoslavia, most clearly in the Srebrenica genocide in July 1995.\*\*

Walter Dignolo (2000) elaborated poignantly the “modern/colonial world system” that is the basis of the racial logic of neoliberal global necrocapitalism. Next, as exposed by other key writers like Ramón Grosfoguel (2011) and María Lugones (2007), the decolonial horizon sharply criticizes the regime of whiteness. Lugones develops, along the critique of the regime of whiteness, a perspective on the colonality of gender, exposing and criticizing not only the colonial regime of power but its heteronormative foundation. This regime is fully at work in the racial system of Eastern Europe too, where whiteness and heteronormativity present themselves as rooted in blood and soil, thus unifying the nation-state.

In the West the white “Eastern European” seems to be “grey.” This simply means that although the majority of East Europeans are white and therefore part of the regime of whiteness and its power mechanism, they are as well discriminated, seen as inferior and not civilized enough, as still tainted by

\* See the journal *Reartikulacija*, specifically issue no. #3 (2008)

\*\* The Srebrenica genocide consisted of the systematic murdering of more than 8,000 Bosniaks, mainly military-aged men and boys, in and around the town of Srebrenica during the Bosnian War by the military forces of “Republika Srpska” [“Serb Republic”] and other Serbian paramilitary forces

their communist past. In these relations of power, East Europeans are seen as backward, populist and nationalistic, and therefore they are treated as grey and not privileged white. This is necessary to incorporate into the analysis of the relation between the East and the West of Europe. Furthermore, whiteness is not only a colour, but a regime of white supremacy that works structurally under neoliberalism through procedures of racialization. As an institution claiming to embody Western Europe and its values, the EU is a hyper neoliberal regime with a huge amount of *hatred*, and, let us be precise, with a huge amount of racial, class and gender *hatred* toward the Other, the migrants and the refugees.

Discrimination, subjugation, degradation of the LGBTQI people, Roma and other minorities, not to talk of the *Erased* people, are disturbingly real. The Erased (*Izbrisani*) is the name used in the media for a mass of people in Slovenia that remained without a legal status after the declaration of the country's independence in 1991. The Erased are mainly people from other former Yugoslav republics, who had been living in Slovenia. They are mostly of non-Slovene or mixed ethnicity, and include a significant number of members of Romani communities. In 1992, when they were all stripped of their documents, we became witnesses to a necropolitical procedure by the newly born state of Slovenia. The Erased lost all health, social and other support from the state, and were, together with their families and their Slovenian-born children transformed into a category of superfluous people without any rights; alive, but socially, politically, economically dead, erased.

While making reference to perspectives like that of Böröcz and Sarkar (2017), Piro Rexhepi, speaking at the above-mentioned conference in Linköping, asked: Who speaks in the name of the postsocialist subject? This question is very important because it also highlights the frequently ignored discriminatory hierarchies that operated during socialism by anchoring the contemporary rise of racism as a simple outcome of postsocialist Europeanization.

First, this means that Eastern Europe is white, Christian, heteronormative and racist, class-subjugated and gender-blind in its “inside” while from the “outside” it is being provincialized by the West. But although it is infantilized and deprived of the history of socialism and at the same time subjugated to exploitative labour-capital relations, it is completely “autonomously” racist towards the refugees, people of colour, and sexual and ethnic minorities.

Therefore, we have to be very precise when we talk about being colonized as Eastern Europeans, while being white, mostly Christian, heteronormative and racist. Colonized? For Eastern Europe this label is decisively suitable as a shield, while exercising “internally” nationalist violence throughout its whole territory.

Second, it is important to say that analyses of neoliberal global capitalism are not done only from a decolonial perspective but as well, and poignantly so, from leftist, feminist, LGBTQI and anti-fascist, anti-racist, migrant standpoint. New generations of those who think of politics and the future exist and they need to be acknowledged. They are situated along the lines of Marxist-Black studies and transfeminist studies that are trying to present a disassembling, sharp analysis of necrocapitalism. What does this mean?

In order to better explain these lastly mentioned positions, I first have to elaborate on the notion of modernity/coloniality that was key for the introduction of the “decolonial turn” in the USA in the 1990s. Modernity/coloniality was, schematically speaking, also an attempt to insert Latin America in a global debate on postcolonialism. In 1997, Aníbal Quijano connected modernity/coloniality with the colonial matrix of power. One of its axioms is fundamental for all of us working with the present neoliberal moment, and holds that “Coloniality is constitutive of Modernity” (Quijano, 1997). The colonial matrix includes, among other lines of power, the control of gender, though in Quijano’s perspective it is too tightly connected to biological sex. In her analysis, Maria Lugones, member of the same working group, contested a binary system of gender as a base for decolonial feminist approaches (2007). This helped develop strategies of depatriarchization of state power and gave new insights on third world feminism. The influence of decolonial feminism is not only materializing in Black, Afro-Latin, Chicana, women of colour (from the USA), and indigenous feminisms, but has effects on former Yugoslavia and throughout Europe.

The third component of the decolonial turn in contemporary analysis is the uncovering of “racial capitalism”. In the foreword of the second edition of Cedric J. Robinson’s *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (originally published in 2000), Robin D.G. Kelley elaborates on Robinson’s “racial capitalism” (as part of compelling memorial thoughts on

the passing away of Robinson in 2016). Kelley stated that what Robinson exposed with “racial capitalism” was that:

*[..] capitalism emerged within the feudal order and flowered in the cultural soil of a Western civilization already thoroughly infused with racialism. Capitalism and racism, in other words, did not break from the old order but rather evolved from it to produce a modern world system of “racial capitalism” dependent on slavery, violence, imperialism, and genocide. Capitalism was “racial” not because of some conspiracy to divide workers or justify slavery and dispossession, but because racialism had already permeated Western feudal society. The first European proletarians were racial subjects (Irish, Jews, Roma, Slavs, etc.) and they were victims of dispossession (enclosure), colonialism, and slavery within Europe (Kelley, 2017: n.p.).*

In the following, I trace this entanglement of class, gender and race through four key relations emerging from the dialogue between post-/decolonial and postsocialist inquiry, namely:

- a) Capitalism and socialism;
- b) Postcolonial and postsocialist;
- c) Decolonial and postsocialist; and
- d) Decolonial and postcolonial.

## **a) Capitalism and socialism**

My intention in this section is to roughly recuperate a series of contemporary shifts that are fundamental for the relation between capitalism and socialism. I have elaborated (see Gržinić and Tatlić, 2014) on them in the past decades and they are: the shifts from liberalism to neoliberalism; from multiculturalist capitalism to global capitalism; from administration of life towards the administration of death; and, from a change in the first capitalist world of imperial nation-states to militarised war-states. Finally, it is of utmost importance that historical colonialism has changed into a contemporary colonial matrix of power, presenting, as I argue, a change or a reappearance of two forms of management of life – governmentality and sovereignty. In all



these radical shifts of forms of power, we also see two different forms of the constitution of the social bond: on the one hand, a postsocialist ex-Second World – Eastern European states – turning into turbo-fascist societies, and, on the other hand, the old colonial imperialist Occidental states, that were once nation-states, changing not only into war-states but developing postmodern fascist social structures, based on a pure individualization, fragmentation and mobilisation of agents, with a persistent rejection of the “Other.”

A decade ago, Santiago López Petit in his book *Global Mobilization: A Brief Treatise for Attacking Reality*\* drew on Marx to provide a key understanding of the way capitalism functions. He exposed that although we are constantly pushed to think that capital has a tendency to “emancipate” and progress, this is not the case. Capitalism, as elaborated by López Petit, is not an irreversible process but a reversible, circular and conflictual event. He states that in the world today, all is brought back to one single event, what he calls the unleashing of capital (in Spanish *des[z]boc[k]amiento*), that can be more colloquially grasped as “unrestraining” or “runaway” of capital. Neoliberal globalization, as stated by López Petit, is nothing more than the *repetition* of this single event (López Petit, 2009: 24). The same way as thinking of capital as being “emancipatory”, we are willing to accept almost naturally made discourses of morality with which neoliberal global capitalism tried to cover up the outcome of various crises: the financial one in 2008, or the so-called “refugee crisis” that is not a refugee but an EU crisis.

But what is important to expose in order to capture the relation between socialism and capitalism, is two different relations between capital and power. In the neoliberal era, what we see is the co-propriety capital/power, which presents a graduation from the unity of capital/power in liberal understandings (López Petit, 2009: 30). What I want to emphasize is that, following López Petit, the space created by neoliberal globalization presents an inextricable complexity. It is not a pluralistic space but a space in which complexity does not permit *extrication*. It is therefore a space that is not at all plural, but one that cannot be disentangled or untied. Achille Mbembe, in his analysis of Africa as the “postcolony”, envisioned precisely such a process, which he calls “*entanglement*” (2001).

\* My translation of the Spanish original (López Petit, 2009).

If we try to delineate a genealogy of a short but dramatic restructuring of the composition of capital and its consequences for the historicization of capitalism, then we have to take into account its transformation that started in the 1970s and that today, as stated by López Petit, has come to its end (2009). This is why we talk about global capitalism and its logic of financialization. The change that Karl Polanyi has named the *Great Transformation* (2001 [1944]) presents the disarticulation of politics, of the economy, and of the social life of the working class, who is the main protagonist of capitalism and its cycle of struggles in the 1970s. This period is best illustrated by Margaret Thatcher's class struggle on the miners striking against the closures of mines in 1984-85 in Great Britain, or in the protests of the Solidarity labour union under the leadership of Lech Wałęsa in socialist Poland throughout the 1980s. Before the disarticulation of the working class we could talk, via López Petit, about the *unity capital/power*. In the course of the *Great Transformation* we see the dismantling of this unity and its transformation into the *co-propriety capital/power*.

The unity capital/power presented a social pact between workers and capitalists (i.e. the bourgeoisie) and the outcome was capitalist social democracy that brought – not as a generous gift but through struggles – social, health, and pension benefits for the workers. The welfare state was the most advanced form of this unity and labour unions had an extremely important role in the process of establishing it. López Petit argues that class struggle was functioning, so to speak, within the plan of capital. Capitalism needed a pact in order to make surplus value, and labour functioning within the particular social composition of capitalist production presented the only way for capital to survive.

The socialist planning state is the best example of this unity, but was rarely part of such a discussion in the West. Rather, it has usually been seen as a totalitarian apparatus restricting workers' rights. Therefore, it is possible to say that the imposed vision of socialism as solely totalitarian was necessary in order to hide the better alternative to the West's Fordism, which had already been realized in its nightmarish form. Yugoslavia was a role model at the time but was hidden from both public debates and academic analysis in the West. Today, being a true historical model, it is being presented in numerous academic panels and political discussions in the East and West as a brand, as

I argue, for a defunct future. The socialist planned economy was the perfect display of what was in Fordist capitalism, so to speak, hidden.

When the unity capital/power was threatened, the response, or to put it differently, the punishment that capitalists imposed, as explained by López Petit, was exemplary (2009). López Petit talks not of the “control” that is connected with post-Fordism but of true social engineering methods of punishment, that were presented in a vertiginous forms of inflation and open-ended crisis. This is why the penalization of the miners by Margaret Thatcher in Great Britain in the 1980s, when post-Fordism had already been ushered in, was so exemplarily tough. What we witnessed was “class struggle” in the West at its purest. Thatcher’s transformation of the society in 1984 was violent. She succeeded with pure violence to change the perception of class struggle that was central for miner strikes into a view where workers’ demands seemed as demands raised by groups of people fighting each other. What we witnessed was the transformation of the capitalist society in the UK into devastated hyper-neoliberal global capitalist communities that executed the complete invalidation of the working-class position.

In socialism, the state responded to such a threat not only with inflation, which was used as a repressive apparatus in capitalism as well, but also with true food shortages that proliferated in the last decades of the 1970s and 1980s (manifesting in humorous narratives on how to get a cup of coffee). In addition, many of the strikes, let alone the violent ways in which police forces attempted to suppress them, were not at all mentioned in the former Yugoslavian mass media but they were, as reported by Fredy Perlman in the period from 1957 to 1968, massive.\*

So the question is how to think about the fundamental change between the relation of capital and labour in modernity, namely the unity of capital/labour being transformed in neoliberal global capitalism into a co-propriety of capital/labour. In putting this shift in relation to coloniality/modernity and the colonial matrix of power, I put forward the following extrapolations: First, the neoliberal Western democracies, which used to be colonial states as well, changed from nation-states into war-states (Germany, UK, France, US, etc.) that exercise governance and violence with brutal exploitation,

\* See Fredy Perlman, ‘Birth of a Revolutionary Movement in Yugoslavia’, edited by Zdravko Saveski, no date,

expropriation, discrimination, repression, and postmodern fascism (López Petit, 2009: 84). The war-state is a purely necropolitical mode of life. It works in conjunction with postmodern fascism that serves as the dissolution of the “democratic” war-state in a multi-reality of social technologies, most importantly digitalization of data and related forms of control. I claim that the war-state, in its verticality – functioning by way of force, violence and fear – is but a pure fascist state. However, using historical fascism to name it would be too simple because we would fail to emphasize the major logic of dominance in the world today: the logic of war. The war-state definitely has elements of classical fascism: a sovereign leader, people, and death as a tool for the management of life. On the other hand, there is also the neoliberal context of the autonomy of individuals, which foregrounds the neoliberal freedom of having rights to be an *individual brand*. For this reason, as proposed by López Petit, we name it postmodern fascism, which sterilizes the “Other”, evacuates the conflict from public space and neutralizes the political (2009: 84). It is thus logical that we continuously repeat that global capitalism is about depoliticization.

Second, it is important to state that after the fall of the Berlin wall, postsocialist countries remained just nation-states without an international sovereignty but with enough domestic power to control and systematically produce homophobic terror and systematic erasure of their socialist history. This includes the suppression of all counter, alternative, emancipatory and leftist, even though also modernist, projects, practices, and interventions. Nationalism has played an important role as an atavistic format of ideology.

Consequently, the third observation is that to Eastern Europe the process of turbo-nationalist neoliberalism has applied a specific format of Fascism that the feminist theoretician Žarana Papić called Turbo-Fascism (Papić, 2002). → Consequently, the third observation is that, to Eastern Europe, the process of turbo-nationalist neoliberalism has applied a specific format of Fascism that the feminist theoretician Žarana Papić (2002) called Turbo-Fascism. Papić proposed Turbo-Fascism to conceptualize hegemonic postsocialist nationalisms in the Balkans in the 1990s, specifically in Serbia, that is, national separatisms, chauvinist and racist exclusion or marginalization of (old and new) minority groups. All these processes were, and are, closely connected with patriarchal, discriminatory and violent politics against

women and their civil and social rights. Papić admits that it is, of course, known that Fascism is a historical term; that the history of Nazi Germany is not the same as that of Milošević's Serbia. However, in postmodernist and feminist theory we speak of "shifting concepts" when "a new epoch inherits, with some additions, concepts belonging to an earlier one", like, for instance the feminist notion of shifting patriarchy (2002: 134). She further argues that "we should not fear the use of 'big terms' if they accurately describe certain political realities" (Papić, 2002: 192).

Finally, if we think about the EU legislative policy we see that the passages described above result in intensified racism and class racialization that are constantly reinvented as neo-colonial structures. In this sense, from a lens that is interested in the colonial matrix of power, we can see a convergence or parallel between the Turbo-Fascist and necropolitical regimes in the former socialist East of Europe, and the war-states and forms of postmodern fascism in Western neoliberal democracies. In the following section, I show how this trajectory can be traced with the help of postcolonial thought, and how the latter relates to postsocialism.

## **b) Postcolonial and postsocialist**

In this section, I will first set out my understanding of postcolonial thought with the help of the work of Achille Mbembe, and subsequently try to establish a relation between the postcolonial and the postsocialist.

What is the postcolonial? As Mbembe stated in an interview for a French magazine *Esprit* in December 2006:

*Postcolonial thought seeks to document what it was to live or to survive under the sign of the Beast. It shows that there is in European colonial humanism something that has to be called unconscious self-hatred. Indeed, racism in general and colonial racism in particular, represents the transference of this self-hatred to the Other (Mbembe, 2006: n.p.).*

He was even sharper when he wrote that "this form of death [that is an outcome of intensified racialization processes] was necessarily conveyed



through that of others, it was a delegated death” (Mbembe, 2006: n.p.). It is this delegated death that is visibly and without shame, without the “old European” morality, imposed today onto refugees. Postcolonial thought, in deconstructing the “mental infrastructures, the symbolic forms and representations underpinning the imperial project” reveals:

*[...] how what passed for European humanism manifested itself in the colonies as duplicity, double-talk and a travesty of reality. Indeed, colonial regimes never ceased telling lies about themselves and others. As Frantz Fanon explains so clearly in Black Skin, White Masks, racialization was the driving force behind this economy of duplicity and falsehood. Race was the Beast at the heart of European colonial humanism (Mbembe, 2006: n.p.).*

Today colonialism repeats itself lethally in the wake of the “refugee crises,” and this “economy of duplicity and falsehood” stays at the centre of European neoliberal necrocapitalist humanism.

I would say, in parallel to Mbembe, that socialism was the great laboratory of modernity in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Yet in this very same century, the extermination camps on the soil of Europe were conceived, managed and devised by the German Nazi regime. If we are to really understand the status of socialism and postsocialism with all the paths that went wrong, we have to be clear that they are diametrically opposed to Nazism and fascism (as Nazism and fascism have no perspectives of the future, only death, destruction, genocide, while socialism brought an utopia for a possible emancipation that went wrong). So I schematically draw a line between the changes regarding the relation of capital/labour (from unity to co-propriety); the historical differences of communism and Nazism and, further, the outcome of a past brutal colonialism as it presents itself in the recent “refugee crisis”, for instance.

To such a setting we should add the changes that happened after World War II, specifically the processes of migration and reconstruction of the West. Western Europe needed a reconstruction labour force, which was recruited specifically from the immiserated south of Europe, such as Italy, and from the three fascist dictatorships in Spain, Portugal, and Greece. This gives a possibility to understand that after the fall of the Berlin Wall, class

antagonism vanished suddenly from the picture and was substituted with other forms of conflict based on cultural racism that had been hidden under the multicultural Western European agendas. The segregation of the “Other” based on a perception of her cultural difference turned into an open form of marginalization, exclusion and hostility. Additionally, in the wake of processes of decolonization, many people from Africa and the Caribbean region moved to the former colonial state in Europe. Today in the European Union, we have political demands made by them that are constantly negotiated (also after several generations) as diaspora citizens in Europe.

All of this brings to the fore the continuity and entanglement of questions of race, class and gender inequalities in the present neoliberal global capitalist regime. However, to further complicate a possible binarism following from the above questions, I have to put forward the following question: Is decolonial queer politics in Europe and globally viable without a more precise re-elaboration of the relation between queer and the categories of nationality and race? No! I argue that we can learn plenty from the conceptualization of queer discourse in relation to nation-state, geography and processes of racialisation – institutionalized, structural, and social racism(s). Why queer? Because we face a question of identity that entangles race and sex and class in the form of a queer condition in the present neoliberal capitalism. Therefore, only if we are able to question the relations between postcolonial and postsocialist subjectivities through constantly imposed race and gender divisions and processes of racialization and class antagonisms inside the hegemonic structures of (Western) European nation states, we will manage to form alliances and coalitions in Europe.

To further elaborate on the mode of operation of present regimes, I argue, based on Paul Preciado’s work, that there are at least two types of capitalism: a “hot” (punk) capitalism that is developing overwhelmingly in the West and the capitalist First World (2013). The specific meaning of this hot capitalism is mostly semiotically-technologically organized. On the other side, there is a “cold” capitalism, a necropolitical discourse of power that extracts its surplus value from non-mediated dispossessions, exclusions, looting, and death. We saw violence of unbelievable proportions against the LGBTQI people in the former Eastern Bloc, in the former Yugoslavia: beatings, killings, as well the negation of their basic human rights. We also

see on a daily basis corpses floating in the sea, corpses of those who want to enter Western Europe: refugees, people without papers, from Africa and Asia, people who drown along the coasts of Italy, Malta, Greece, etc., and lately, more and more, near Libya. The colonial/racial division is applied to citizenship so that we have two categories of citizenship: one is the category which I will name this, following the work of Foucault, *biopolitical citizenship* (the EU “natural” nation-state citizens) and the other is, following Mbembe, *necropolitical citizenship*, given to refugees and sans-papiers (paperless) after they die on EU soil.

The “cold” East’s necropolitics presents a brutal logic of violence, persecutions, discrimination, and racializations in the former Eastern European space (the former Yugoslavia, Russia, and other post-Soviet countries). Biopolitics and necropolitics work globally, though necropolitics operates visibly mostly in the so-called periphery and create surplus value by death (real and social death of any kind where mostly non-mediated violence is present).

It is clear that what global capitalism brings before us is a necessity to revisit globally racist, homophobic, and discriminatory processes, not as simple identity differences but as processes that are entangled with capital, new media technology and death. On the other side, it is important to emphasize lines of common struggles. A good reflection is provided by Stanimir Panayotov (2018), who rethinks alliances and lines of common struggle as follows:

*The work on Balkanism needs the return of “class” as racialization to survey ethnicity-as-race as a continuity. Something of a merger between (...) Gržinić’s necropolitics can be sensed in El-Tayeb’s proposal of “queering of ethnicity”: A queering, or “creolizing” of theory, if you will, that works on the intersections of concepts and disciplines, opens the potential of expressing exactly the positionality deemed impossible in dominant European discourses, namely that of Europeans of color... The contact zone between Gržinić and El-Tayeb (...) is not an academic contest to mark CEE as colonial, but as racist colonial. For if the colonial analytic crumbles each time under silently racialized class and ethnicity, then what is the use of “de-provincializing Europe”?\* (Panayotov, 2018: 66-67).*

\* Panayotov refers to my part of the book coauthored with Šefik Tatlić, *Necropolitics, Racialization, and Global Capitalism. Historicization of Biopolitics and Forensics of Politics, Art, and Life* (2014) and to Fatima El-Tayeb’s text *Creolizing Europe* (2014).

The presentation above allows to understand that postsocialist space or the space of what is today termed Central-East Europe can be seen as colonial space not because it is colonized but because it is governed by the centre of the EU and its Occidental core through modes of suppression, discrimination, infantilization, etc., that are established along racial (the CEE still not being civilized enough), class (labour and by means of underdeveloped capitalist production) and gender lines. Of course, this is a process that is reinforced internally by the hyper-neoliberal and nationalistic policies of political elites and economic tycoons.

### **c) Decolonial and postsocialist**

At this point we have to enter the discussion of the relation between the decolonial and the postsocialist. Two writers are central to this relation: Madina Tlostanova and Walter D. Mignolo, who established a decolonial perspective on how to enter this relation, centring on Russia (Mignolo and Tlostanova, 2006; Tlostanova and Mignolo 2009). To be very clear, Madina Tlostanova was amongst the first ones who engaged in these questions. On the other side, however, what is also to be exposed is what I will name a blockage of the future for millions of Eastern European subjects, who are today framed as post Eastern Europeans by turbo capitalism. One of my theses is that such a blockage is the outcome of rethinking the relation of the state, former socialism, modernity and socialist society, and last but not least, the October revolution. Some parallels that I want to establish in between theoreticians coming from the former Soviet Union and working on the listed topics and some decolonial post-Soviet elaborations are important for the analysis and my thesis.

Already in 2004, Sergey Nazipovich Gavrov devoted his book *Modernization of the Russian Empire* to the problems of Russia's modernization and post-imperial transition. The author tries to find answers to key questions: what distinguishes "us" in a cultural and institutional sense, from the "old" Europe? Why, in spite of changes in the surrounding world, does Russia still come back to familiar imperial or quasi-imperial ways? Gavrov (2004) exposes that the

social and cultural aspects of modernization in Russia were just an external and a not very successful strategy, while the imperial consciousness remained essentially the same under Peter, Stalin and Putin. In other words, the concept of modernization in Russia was purely compensatory and was generally aimed at strengthening the imperial system.

Gavrov argues that Russia, after having lost its theocratic element in the form of the Soviet myth with the collapse of USSR, unsuccessfully tries to transform this lost myth into a nationalist ideal, but that its globalist imperial origins constantly stick out. So the process of modernization in Socialist Russia followed the idea of “progression” established by Western civilization but imposed it only in terms of a modernization in industrial and military technology. This means that military-technical elements are the only ones that mattered and all the other aspects traditionally associated with modernization efforts in a social and political sense – such as civil rights, freedom, and civil society – practically did not matter. He concludes that Russian modernization did not include modernity but served to strengthen the past Russian feudal imperial grounds into a civilizational-cultural system.

Madina Tlostanova on her part, and from the viewpoint of decoloniality, approaches these problematic relations in a slightly different manner, stating that:

*The concept of the Second World including the ex-socialist world is a typical product of Western modernity looking at its non-absolute other from outside and, consequently, homogenizing its multiplicity and diversity following the well-known logic of either neglecting the other or misinterpreting it as the same or as the predecessor of the same. Instead of the Second World we should speak of the world of imperial difference which would allow to understand its specificity in its own terms and logic and also vis-à-vis the Western modernity marked by global coloniality. If for Latin America it is the colonial difference that plays the crucial role, then for Russia, as well as for Spain, that lost its dominance in the second modernity, it is the imperial difference that comes forward (Tlostanova, 2008: 1).*

Furthermore, she proposes that we see the imperial difference as divided in two: as internal and external imperial difference. Tlostanova argues that the



internal imperial difference works inside the “Western European reference system, Western Christianity, and Latin-based languages” (2008: 1). On the other hand, she states that Russia is an example of an external imperial difference: “[Russia’s] imperial populace is Slavic, i.e. rather remote from Western Europe, it is Orthodox Christian and even its alphabet does not correspond to European expectations of imperial language and literacy” (Tlostanova, 2008: 1).

Tlostanova develops a turbo decadent picture of Russian imperialism, without any form of opening for resistance or self-determination by popular mobilisation or by civil society. She states: “Russia is a second-grade imperial force, an external imperial force looking from the east. Russia itself felt a colony in the presence of the West and at the same time half-heartedly played the part of the caricature – a civilizer in its non-European, mostly Islamic colonies” (Tlostanova, 2008: 2). In her view, “The Soviet empire in its subaltern imperial nature was not essentially different from the Czarist one, though it reformulated the main developmentalist slogan in a more radical way, attempting to build a socialist modernity – to catch up and leave behind, while also escalating its global geopolitical appetites” (Tlostanova, 2008: 2). Tlostanova is clear: “Russia is secondary subaltern empire marked with external imperial difference, Russia is also a curious example of a survived theocratic empire, at least in its intentions and in its mentality, if not in reality” (Tlostanova, 2008: 2).

The difference between Gavrov and Tlostanova is conceptual and political. Gavrov shows the ways in which economic, political and social factors deprived the space and what are the elements that the continuation of the feudal into the imperial hinges upon. He emphasizes visions of civil society and civil rights,\* while for Tlostanova who is engaged solely in a semiotic-decolonial re-reading of Russia as secondary subaltern empire, there is nothing else than a desert in this regard.

The next conceptual step is provided by Tlostanova and Mignolo who in 2009 specifically elaborate on the Russian October revolution but as only a socialist modernity that comes after the split of the Enlightenment

\* He talks of the co-existence of heterogeneous Russian regions and their inhabitants based on the principles of federalism with elements of confederacy, and of the existence of a civil, multi-ethnic nation. Civil, rather than ethnic nation is for him an important aspect of this proposal (Gavrov, 2004).

project into two modernities, i.e. a liberal and a socialist one (Tlostanova and Mignolo, 2009). As they state:

*It is possible to argue, of course, that there were already too many revolutionary projects in modernity. But most of them were based on Western modernity products or their local clones – from the leftist discourses to various kinds of nationalism, including the postcolonial nationalism, ethnocentrism and religious fundamentalism. (Tlostanova and Mignolo, 2009: 132).*

They continue:

*a polycentric world order has made obsolete the modern idea of “revolution”, for two reasons. One is that in polycentric world order, in spite of the competition for control of authority, there is no more room for an idea of revolution that will consist in taking control of the state (like the bourgeoisie did in Europe over the monarchy; the Bolsheviks over the Russians Czars; like the Creole from European descent (except in Haiti) did in the Americas since the end of the 18th century; or the natives did in Asia and Africa, during the era of decolonization, after WWII). The second reason is that all the revolutions we have mentioned were revolutions within the same cosmology, within the same rules of the game. And the word “revolution” itself is meaningful only within the ideology of progress and development, within the realm of sameness (Tlostanova and Mignolo, 2009: 139-140).*

I argue that it is necessary at this point to clash with such a view as it presents a total closure – even more, it erases the whole former Eastern European space. It can be added that even though in her book *Decolonial Gender Epistemologies and Eurasian Borderlands* (2010) has offered indications of the ways in which (formerly) imperial subjects can resist the production of exclusion, in her later works such as *Can the post-Soviet Think?* (2015), she has completely overlooked initiatives to recover post-identitarian, decolonial potentialities in the history of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe that I expose in this text.

More to the point, central reference for my thoughts is provided by another forerunner of decolonial thought, Lewis Gordon. In 1997, in his brilliant introduction to the anthology *Existence in Black*, Gordon stresses

that “Africana philosophy’s history of Christian, Marxist, Feminist, Pragmatist, Analytical, and Phenomenological thought has... been a matter of what specific dimensions each had to offer the existential realities of theorizing blackness.” (Gordon, 1997: 4). Marxism is a key theoretical line in the whole idea of transformation of the exploitative bourgeois society that the socialist revolution aimed to dismantle. Gordon exposes that:

*For Marxism, for instance, it was not so much its notions of “science” over all other forms of socialist theory, nor its promise of a world to win, that may have struck a resonating chord in the hearts of black Marxists. It was, instead, Marx and Engels’ famous encomium of the proletarians having nothing to lose but their chains. Such a call has obvious affinity for a people who have been so strongly identified with chattel slavery (Gordon, 1997: 4).*

Reiland Rabaka in his *Africana Critical Theory: Reconstructing the Black Radical Tradition* (2009) quotes Gordon referring to his chapter *Existential Dynamics of Theorizing Black Invisibility in Existence in Black*:

*Cabral, Fanon, Du Bois, James, and the theorists of Negritude, among other Africana intellectual-activists, have each critically engaged Marxist (socialist and/or communist) theory, among other traditions and schools of thought, precisely insofar as they understand them to offer viable alternatives to the human suffering and misery of their respective times and circumstances. Césaire (1972) may very well have said it best when he stated that the necessity of “our liberation placed [and continues to place] us on the left” (Gordon, 1997: 78 in Rabaka, 2009: 280).*

Rabaka further references Gordon: “Marx is all right, but we need to complete Marx” (Gordon, 1997: 70 in Rabaka, 2009: 280). To turn back to my initial discussion, my critique of Tlostanova and Mignolo’s argument is based on their inability or unwillingness to think any potentiality for contemporary counter-positions and communities in Russia and the postsocialist world more generally. Although not developed explicitly, their argument applies to most parts of formerly Soviet-dominated Eastern Europe and, more implicitly, the Yugoslav socialist state with its very similar mode of operation and overarching modernist worldview.

The dismissal of the socialist past and its positive potentials begs the question: What do we do with positions envisioned as Black Europe, the LGBTQI, and migrant viewpoints, as well as the new generation of young critical postsocialist activist youth that are asking for decolonial transformations of their nationalistic societies? Or, as was asked by the Balkan Society for Theory and Practice (BSTP) in Prizren (Kosovo), as part of a workshop concept in July 2018, how do we approach places traditionally deemed unphilosophical as sites of theoretical and practical resistance that are capable to re-think and re-engage resistance? Or how do we read some politically leftist projects that oppose the right-wing nationalistic and turbo-fascist structures developed palpably after the fall of the Berlin Wall in the former Eastern European context? One possible answer is that we cannot dismiss, contra Tlostanova and Mignolo, the analysis of the political economy, the question of how capitalism deprives the “white” working class and, finally, the struggles of new generations of people in the former East that fought and are fighting to preserve social justice, entitlements and dignity (e.g. abortion rights, public schools, public health, etc.).

Furthermore, Tlostanova and Mignolo’s discussion is mainly centred on the question of knowledge, while the labour-capital relations, the dispossession and exploitation, the necro-turbo nationalistic capitalism that have manifested on the Balkans, are all left out of view. By adopting exactly a decolonial lens, I would rephrase Sabelo J Ndlovu-Gatsheni’s question: “can Africans create African futures within a modern world system structured by global coloniality?” (2014: 181). This same question can be posed for the whole territory of the defunct East of Europe, particularly because Ndlovu-Gatsheni was already in 2014 clear that we are facing a situation where “Even the current global power transformations which have enabled the re-emergence of a Sinocentric economic power and de-Westernization processes including the rise of South-South power blocs such as BRICS, do not mean that the modern world system has now undergone genuine decolonisation and de-imperialisation to the extent of being amenable to the creation of other futures” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2014: 181). The logic is that, although it is a constant idea of a saviour, we see that “revisionist” changes of geopolitical relations and expectations do not bring about the results one would hope for. On the contrary, the rise of the BRICS appears to have led

to a reproduction or deepening of the colonial-capitalist system, even if in less obvious ways or even under claims to more equal and “non-conditional” forms of cooperation and support.

At this point it is important to expose the difference between postcolonial and decolonial thinking, as the emergence of decolonial theory opened a renewed possibility for discussions on the postsocialist space. Decolonial theory, explicitly, intensified and re-invigorated the whole discussion on a past colonialism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. With this, it also opened questions of dependence, subjugations and erasure of other past territories and populations.

## **d) Decolonial and postcolonial**

Where does decoloniality stand? Its most distinctive characteristic is geographical. Decolonial thinking was developed by scholars from Latin-America mostly based in the US in the 2000s, while postcolonial thought was significantly, though not only, formed by Indian scholars (the most known is the “Subaltern Studies Group”) with a history going back to the 1970s. This is maybe a schematic line of sorting out the genealogies, but it is important to understand as well the precise geopolitical place of formation of these different discourses. Why? Because what we see is connected not only with epistemology but struggles in concrete geopolitical spaces.

As Ramón Grosfoguel explains in a remarkable analysis of the relation between decoloniality and postcolonial studies, “the moment of coming to a life of a decolonial view was in October 1998, there was a conference/dialogue at Duke University between the South Asian Subaltern Studies Group and the Latin American Subaltern Studies Group. The members of the Latin American Subaltern Studies Group were primarily Latin-American scholars in the USA. Despite their attempt at producing a radical and alternative knowledge, they reproduced the epistemic schema of Area Studies in the United States” (2011: 3-4). Grosfoguel further situates the line of the split “between those who read subalternity as a postmodern critique (which represents a Eurocentric critique of Eurocentrism) and those who read subalternity as a decolonial critique (which represents a critique of



Eurocentrism from subalternized and silenced knowledges) (Grosfoguel, 2011: 3-4). Thus, Grosfoguel exposes three main points:

*1) that a decolonial epistemic perspective requires a broader canon of thought than simply the Western canon (including the left Western canon); 2) that a truly universal decolonial perspective cannot be based on an abstract universal (one particular that raises itself as universal global design) but would have to be the result of the critical dialogue between diverse critical epistemic/ethical/political projects towards a pluriversal as opposed to a universal world; 3) that decolonization of knowledge would require us to take seriously the epistemic perspective/cosmologies/insights of critical scholars from the Global South thinking from and with subalternized racial/ethnic/sexual spaces and bodies. Postmodernism and poststructuralism as epistemological projects are caught within the Western canon reproducing within its domains of thought and practice a particular form of coloniality of power/knowledge. (Grosfoguel, 2011: 4).*

My stance in this relation is that the decolonial is extremely important as it resituates racialization in the middle of neoliberal global capitalism. Although race and racism were present in conceptualizations of the postcolonial, they were discussed and analyzed through questions of cultural and other forms of differentiation. Decolonial thinking recovers racialization as the most important mechanism that organizes the global neoliberal system.

This becomes even more apparent when reading Grosfoguel further. In order to build a genealogy of racialization(s), it is of key importance to include two systems of annihilation, one being colonialism and the other being the Holocaust with its contemporary formats of anti-Semitism. The decolonial discourse aims to call out imperial forces and to expose the annihilations of millions of slaves in colonialism, through the transformations brought through the colonial matrix of power (Grosfoguel, 2011). This means that a process of racialization is at the core of the organization of contemporary global capitalist society. This process is not simply a cultural differentiation in a society, but a process of steady racial *classificatory matrix* that sustains a monopoly on classification; at the same time, *racialization* is obscured with the processes of *rationalization* of capitalist expansion and exploitation.

## Conclusion

In this article, I tried to expose the relevance and divisions between postsocialist and post-/decolonial perspectives. I did so from a political-theoretical point that endorses the thesis that decolonial theory intensifies and re-invigorates the discussion on colonialism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Decolonial theory/thought and the associated “decolonial option” discloses that colonialism does not belong to the past, but that in the time of neoliberal global necrocapitalism through the colonial matrix of power (Quijano, 1997) violently racializes people and nations all around the world.

Therefore, decolonial theory develops a set of theoretical notions allowing for the pertinent analysis of changes and deregulations brought by global necrocapitalism. Furthermore, it also offers essential vocabularies with which to frame EU racializations and the subjugation of former colonized peoples (from Africa, the Middle East, East Asia, etc.), coming to Europe as migrants and refugees (due to the war induced by the Occident in the Middle East and North Africa).

With the processes of the enlargement of the European Union after the Fall of the Berlin Wall (1989), the external division of Europe (the Cold War Europe of the 1950s-1970s) has changed into an internal division. After 2001, the EU started to re/produce a divide along an Occident/Orient line, transforming the external into an internal division through the War on Terror in the Middle East. This division resides on racialization. Racialization is not just a process of producing tropes, it is not only about a fast process of a capital's narrativization of racialization, not only about immanent levels of dispossession but also a process inherent to capital itself.

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## INTRODUCTION 7

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